

THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING MAGAZINE OF CULT ENTERTAINMENT

# STARBURST

ISSUE  
401





# ACROSS THE WORLD

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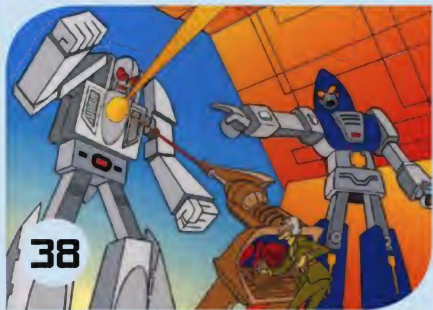


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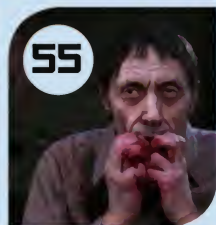
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# EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 401.

Well it's business as usual again after our 400th Issue celebrations. On behalf of all of us at STARBURST, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you that took the time to email or write in to wish us well. It means a lot to us. So what are we up to this month?

Well it's definitely a bone of contention. It just happens to be one that divides us at the same time as cleaning up at the box office. I am, of course, referring to the Michael Bay Transformers mega-franchise that is due to arrive shortly. Divisive or not, we can't miss this opportunity to look back at the history of those robots in disguise. It would be rude not to. We also have GoBots, Godzilla, Godzooky, all your regular goodies and more! Just a quick reminder: We do now have a letters page. So write or email us at one of the addresses below - we want to hear your views on just about anything (well, within reason!). Until next time.

Keep watching the weird and wonderful...

  
Jordan M. Royce  
EDITOR

# FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:  
STARBURST MAGAZINE, PO Box 4508, Manchester, M61 0GY  
or email: [letters@starburstmagazine.com](mailto:letters@starburstmagazine.com)

## DEZ MACKEY?

Really liked your new look. Always enjoyed the retro approach but it looks so much classier now! And a letters column too! You spoil us! Nice to see some candid photos of the new head honcho too. Doesn't look like Dez is giving you as tough a time as the last people he worked with (see below).

Andy Lowe, via email

Giggins is ogling our Honorary Editor-in-Chief's crotch regions...! Glad you mentioned last issue's photos, as we forget to say a big "thank you" to Dez's fiancée the lovely Aniko for providing them. For shame. You can check out some more from the STARBURST launch party on her website: [brightonandhovephotography.wordpress.com](http://brightonandhovephotography.wordpress.com)

## 50p

It's 1977 in a northern town called Ossett in West Yorkshire, a ten year old boy is being dragged around by his mother as they go shopping when he happens to see a magazine that catches his eye. It has a badly depicted painting of Star Wars on the cover... it's called STARBURST. This ten year old is already a sci-fi/horror nut job and has seen all the Godzilla movies at independent cinemas with his dad, as well as theatrical showings of Buster Crabbe's Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon serials... yes I was and am a geek! The ten year old then pleads for 50p to buy it, his



Uncanny! But we're a little concerned as to why Walton

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mother agrees and that's when my long relationship with this magazine began. Now, at the grand old age of 47, I still find myself looking forward to each issue every month. Who says you have to grow up?

I've lived through the ups and downs of this magazine and on more than one occasion thought it was going to disappear into the great publishing house in the sky. Thankfully you're still here. I'm sure like many people my favourite contributors were Crawley and Brosnan... especially Brosnan, he was the devil's advocate, the fox in the chicken coop... and you just knew that he revelled in what he wrote and the response he would receive; I loved it. I'm pretty sure the term 'fanboy' wasn't coined back in those days but he certainly managed to rattle many a reader. But he was invariably correct in his opinions. Sadly missed. If I live long enough I'll be trundling down to the newsagent in my trusty mobility scooter to pick up #500. Good to see you back!

Simon Pearce,  
OSSETT, WEST YORKSHIRE

Great to know you're with us for the journey. By issue #500 we will be able to beam STARBURST directly into your mind, no need for a mobility scooter! Who wants to be the guinea pig?

#### HUBBA HUBBA

Great that STARBURST is still doing what it did back in the day with interesting and different articles, rather than becoming a brown nose advert for anything on down Cineworld like some genre magazines did.

Also, thank you for

## STAR

### REMEMBERING JOHN BROSINAN

I'm one of the early STARBURST fans, having first come to it via #2 in early 1978. What grabbed me then was Alan Grace's article on *The Prisoner*, still the piece I would show to anyone interested in the programme who wanted to know more about it. So it was a really good nostalgia trip to buy #400 and relive the old days I've kept a fair amount of issues but not all of them, those valuable interviews with Gerry Anderson, Terry Nation, Nigel Kneale etc.

It was especially good to see recaps of the work of T. S. Vohamir (apart from T. S. there weren't many sources on the old TV material) I liked, he must have read my mind) and John Brosnan. I met John

once in 1991 to interview him and subsequently review his then latest book, *The Primal Screen: A History of Science Fiction Film*. It was a nicely spent Saturday afternoon in central London. After I heard of his sad death in 2005, I was fortunate to have my letter (one of two praising John's memory) printed in #325, an issue with the then new Doctor, Christopher Eccleston, on the cover. I'd like to reiterate from my letter that to me John was the science fiction world's equivalent of presenter John Peel, who had also died recently. By this I meant that both were often scathing of hyped-up product and enthused about what they saw as the quirky and original.

Recently I was given John's book *The Horror People* for my birthday. Writing in the mid 1970s, he was saying, backed up by Robert Bloch, that it was often the horror films that were

remembered from any one year rather than the more critically acclaimed ones which scooped Academy Awards. In what must now seem a prophetic sentence, John wrote "One wonder is which will be regarded in 40 years' time as the film of 1974. *The Sting*, which reaped so many Academy Awards, or *The Exorcist*?" While *The Sting* remains a fine film, I'm sure that most people quizzed today on which of those movies they've heard of would plump for the horror. Does the same go for 1988's *Ordinary People vs The Shining*? The example Robert Bloch used in John's book was 1933's *Cavalcade vs King Kong*.

Happy 400th. Well done for still going strong.

Chris Gibbings  
HOWDEN, EAST YORKSHIRE

## LETTER

introducing me to so much good stuff recently. *Sparks, Zombina and the Skeletones* and for STARBURST Shauna, she's a very funny lady! In the editorial of #400 you said how great it was to make a magazine with your mates - well I feel like I'm reading a magazine made by my mates, who are a sick mad lot, but I love em! Cheers!

Andy (aka The Rev), via email

Shauna says: "Woah, woah, Andy, hold your horses! You make it sound like we're an item! I'm not saying that would be a bad thing... but c'mon dude, you gotta take me to Cineworld first. I hear *The Legend of Hercules* is good..."

#### UNLUCKY NUMBER SEVEN

"Offers absolutely nothing new in terms of artistic or technical achievement."

"The first act plods along for what seems like hours." "Renny Harlin cannot direct himself out of an IKEA." These sample lines from #400's *The Legend of Hercules* review. Then why, pray tell, was it awarded 7 out of 10 stars? Like many filmmakers I choose to save the actual review for when I've seen the movie (for fear of spoilers), but still use the score to decide whether I should make the trip to the cinema or wait for it to turn up in my local B&M Bargains. I have enclosed my ticket stub and demand compensation for the trauma I've suffered as a result of this utterly perplexing "recommendation" of yours.

Geoff Lawrence,  
WEYMOUTH, DORSET

Busted. Sorry Geoff, the truth is we'd actually rated the film 2/10, but the office gremlins were very busy that month, and this woefully inaccurate score slipped by undetected. Refund's on its way. In fact, if you, like Geoff, were cruelly tricked into seeing *The Legend of Hercules* due to our star faux pax, send your tickets to the Ed and he'll reimburse you in full. [Hang on, I didn't agree to this! - Ed]

## twitter

@STARBURST\_MAG

Wow, the cast of STAR WARS: EPISODE VII has been announced! Let's discuss it!

@Roo8019: OMG! Awesome! Can't wait! Looks great and we go Hamill, Fisher and Ford back! Eekkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk! :)

@MatthewCurd: Where's Lando!

@MonsterPanPan: I always said Emperor Ming was a Sith Lord and no one believed me!

@ConventionGuide: woohooo!

@TygerWhoCame2T2: MING THE MERCILESS!

@TScottBrave: WHERE'S BILLY DEE?!

@gladok50: more birds in starwars abramms you mincing hairy bear felcher



"As if the werewolf thing wasn't bad enough, now David had knelt on some LEGO..."

Winner: Tom Mason. Head over to [www.starburstmagazine.com](http://www.starburstmagazine.com) to enter this month's caption contest.



# THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE  
BEST (AND WORST)  
OF THIS MONTH'S  
MOVIE / TV NEWS

## GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY



We've been waiting to see a close up of Karen Gillan's Nebula [I beg your pardon?! - Ed] since the first fleeting glimpse [Where's this leading?! - Ed] in last February's trailer debut [Ohhh, Nebula's her character! Gotcha. - Ed], so props to Marvel Studios for releasing a trio of great new **Guardians of the Galaxy** images. Head over to Marvel.com to see the other two, both featuring Chris Pratt staring at balls [And here we go again. - Ed]. In further **GotG** news, director James Gunn has confirmed what we were all suspecting – the film will tie into the events of 2018's **Avengers 3**. Get ready for a Mighty Marvel Team-Up as the two super groups band together to take down the biggest of big bads, Thanos.

## TERMINATOR: GENESIS

Being no stranger to time-travel shenanigans, the latest addition to the currently shooting reboot/sequel actually makes a lot of sense – Matt Smith has joined the cast in an unspecified, but significant role. Not only that, but the former Doctor will also appear in each of the new trilogy entries. (That's right, if you've been bummed out by news of a new **Terminator** flick, there's actually three on their way. Sorry!) Also revealed to be playing a part this month is body builder/trainer Aaron Williamson, who posted a Facebook message letting the cat out of the bag that he was playing a T-800. Thought all T-800s looked like a certain Mr. Schwarzenegger? So did we. Which gives us two options: a) We were all wrong, which is highly annoying as the movies seemed to suggest that very fact, or b) Williamson is playing the body of a young T-800 only, with Arnie's face digitally grafted on later. Talking of Arnold's mug, according to rumours the mysterious age-appropriate T-800 he's playing may or may not sport a beard. Come back next month for more exhilarating **Terminator** updates!

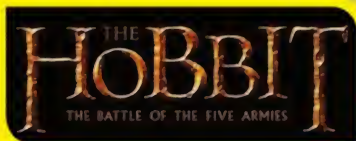
## JUSTICE LEAGUE

Ever since the inclusion of Batman in Zack Snyder's **Man of Steel** sequel, fans have been questioning whether the movie is going to end up being the long-awaited **Justice League**. The first big Warner Bros/DC news of this month saw relatively unknown stage actor Ray Fisher announced to play the role of Victor Stone, aka Cyborg, in Snyder's sequel, joining Henry Cavill's Superman, Ben Affleck's Batman, and Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman. Next up was the confirmation that Snyder would be returning to direct an actual, bona fide **Justice League** movie after the **Man of Steel** sequel! In fact, not only would he be returning, he'd also be shooting **Justice League** back-to-back with the Superman/Batman mash-up, with an expected 2017 release.

Whilst no further news is known at this stage on just who else will make up the Justice League team, the WB is rumoured to be working on a further NINE DC-themed movies away from these two upcoming Snyder efforts. It's already known that **Sandman** and **Fables** are getting adapted for the big screen, but that leaves seven holes to fill. There's literally an endless amount of possibilities on this front, although it seems as if the studio may take another crack at Green Lantern at this point. Then there's the inevitable solo movie for Affleck's Dark Knight, those constant rumours of Dwayne Johnson to play Lobo, possible big screen transitions for Stephen Amell's Arrow and Grant Gustin's Flash, plus that long-standing Guillermo del Toro **Justice League Dark**. Right now, we'd also not be surprised to see further names added to Snyder's **Man of Steel** sequel, which is released on May 6th, 2016. | AP

## YELLOWSTONE FALLS

In this age of endless reboots, remakes and sequels, it's not often we get to spread the word about truly original genre projects. So enjoy this moment while it lasts! **Yellowstone Falls** is a recent script acquisition from QED International which sees a group of wolf cubs and their mother do battle with Liam Neeson saving mutated humans in the wake of an apocalyptic event. But don't expect any anthropomorphising here, the screenplay is largely dialogue free. Told you it was unique! Though its author Daniel Kunka is relatively new on the scene (his sole produced film to date is the 2009 John Cena flick **12 Rounds**), we reported on his previous sale **Bermuda Triangle** over a year ago. Let's hope **Yellowstone** doesn't vanish like that one seems to have. (Which is kind of apt if you think about it...)



Don't panic. Peter Jackson hasn't gone completely insane and stretched his adaptation even further by adding a fourth (though that news wouldn't particularly shock us to be honest), this is actually the new title for December's trilogy closer, with the old **There and Back Again** moniker now likely to be used in reference to the eventual collected boxset release next year.



## STAR WARS

Holy Bantha poodoo! Is that really the foot of an AT-AT those gaffers are hefting onto the Abu Dhabi set / bound-to-be-Tatooine? Will **12 Years a Slave** star Lupita Nyong'o really wield dual 'sabres as the deadly Night Sister of Dathomir, Asaji Ventress?!!? Is **Episode VII** really going to be called **The Order of the Jedi**?!!!! All rumours currently circling at the time of writing, and all ones we hope will prove true. Not that **The Order of the Jedi** is a particularly exciting title, but it's at least safe, saving us the daily worry that Abrams is going to get all clever and inflict another **Into Darkness**-type head-scratcher on us. But instead of concentrating on yet more rumours (we've had a year of 'em after all), it's time to roll out the first actual concrete news Lucasfilm has dropped in an excruciatingly long time. Yup, it's finally official, the gang are back! Ford, Fisher, Hamill, Mayhew, Daniels and Baker will all reprise the roles that went on to define the rest of their lives back in 1977. At the time of going to print, Billy Dee Williams has yet to be announced as fan fave Lando Calrissian, which seems odd to say the least (Luke ain't the only one to take down a Death Star, guys). But unless Abrams has some kind of personal vendetta against Billy Dee (perhaps he unwisely cracked a lens flare gag not knowing he was the billionth to do so, sending J.J. over the edge) we expect the guy won't be absent from these pages for very long. But it wasn't just the old guard who Lucasfilm announced this month, oh no. **Episode VII** has a whole host of new faces joining the party, some that need no introduction – Andy Serkis, Max von Sydow – and others that need a patronising parentheses with an example of their work right after their name just in case you've never heard of 'em: Adam Driver (HBO's *Girls*), John Boyega (*Attack the Block*), the award-winning Oscar Isaac (though not for *Sucker Punch*, it must be said), Domhnall Gleeson (*About Time*) and 21-year old newcomer Daisy Ridley (an episode of *Casualty* once). Naturally, although introduced to the world with great fanfare, Disney/Lucasfilm decided to omit the crucial details of just who any of this talented bunch would be playing, ensuring many months of speculation to come. Other new details revealed this month: the new movies will be budgeted at \$175-\$200m according to Disney chairman Alan Horn (comparatively, *Revenge of the Sith* set George back \$115m and *Return of the Jedi* \$33m!); September will see Topps release a dedicated **Star Wars** series of their 47-year old **Wacky Packages** trading card line; and, in a concerted effort to acquaint younglings to the older characters about to be re-introduced into the saga (because believe it or not, there are certain fans out there that have literally been raised on a diet of *Clone Wars* alone!), Disney-Lucasfilm Press will produce a series of children's books retelling the original trilogy, beginning with *The Adventures of Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight* written by Tony DiTerlizzi (*The Spiderwick Chronicles*), and featuring art by the legendary Ralph McQuarrie. For the more ADD-afflicted, there's also some weird App thing called **Star Wars Journeys** that's been conceived with a similar purpose. Why the studio doesn't trust parents to just plop their kids in front of the DVD boxset is anyone's guess, but if we had a \$4b investment to protect we'd be doing everything in our power to create more generations of **Star Wars** obsessives too!

## THE SINISTER SIX

With **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** having now had time to sink in, it was believed that we would be kept in suspense as to the exact line-up of the confirmed cinematic **Sinister Six** movie. Apparently not! Using the powers of the 'Shazam' mobile app when Alicia Keys' *It's on Again* plays during the end credits of **ASM2**, your phone will actually reveal six pictures that tease just which villains will appear in **The Sinister Six**. Joining the Green Goblin and Rhino, it appears that the villain-centric movie will also feature Doctor Octopus, the Vulture, Kraven the Hunter and Mysterio. Whilst there have been nods towards some of those names before, namely Doc Ock and Vulture, we fully expected to have to wait a little while longer for the rest of the roster.

As Andrew Garfield is only apparently signed up for three **Spider-Man** movies, many have speculated that somebody else may take over the Wallcrawler's iconic red and blue duds after

## JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS



Did you think we were pulling your leg about that **Jem and the Holograms** live-action movie last issue? Here's proof it wasn't all just an elaborate internet hoax after all! Production on the movie has moved ridiculously fast since last month, and director Jon M. Chu (*G.I. Joe: Retaliation*) looks set to start unveiling the unlikely project starting with this debut teaser poster (which, surprisingly, is a little more moody than we'd have expected) featuring the newly revealed cast. Who they're good? Good question. You're looking at Aubrey Peeples (*Sharknado*), Stefanie Scott (*A.N.T. Farm*), Hayley Kiyoko (*The Awakening*) and Aurora Perrineau (*A House is Not a Home*) as Jem, Kimber, Aja and Shana respectively. **Step Up Revolution**'s Ryan Guzman (not pictured) will play **The Holograms'** road manager (and Jem love interest) Rio Pacheco. If you weren't excited before, we bet you are now! [Please tell me that was sarcasm... – Ed]

**The Amazing Spider-Man 3**. Adding further to this idea, Garfield himself has been championing the cause for Miles Morales, the current 'Ultimate' Spider-Man, to appear on the big screen. Sadly for Morales fans and Garfield, producer Avi Arad quickly moved to shoot down such suggestion, claiming that the cinematic Spidey should only ever be Peter Parker. Still, whether Garfield remains in the frame once **The Amazing Spider-Man 3** is over, that's the question. Also in flux is the exact release date of the post-**ASM3** movies. Previously, **The Amazing Spider-Man 4** had been penciled in for a May 4th, 2018 release. Recent word from the powers that be at Sony has confirmed that the Drew Goddard-directed **The Sinister Six** will definitely appear before **The Amazing Spider-Man 4**, which suggests the former will actually be taking said May 2018 slot. And then there's Alex Kurtzman's **Venom** movie, which could also appear before **The Amazing Spider-Man 4**. Up next though, and hopefully learning from the mistakes of **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**, is the June 10th, 2016 release **The Amazing Spider-Man 3**. [AP

## FANTASTIC VOYAGE

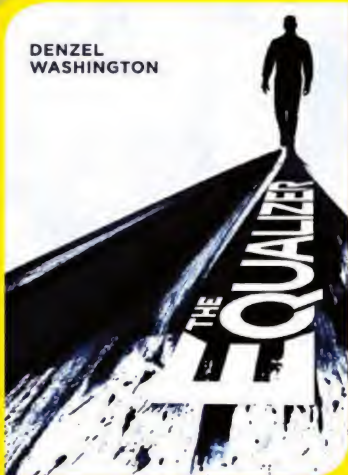
20th Century Fox has hired prolific screenwriter David Goyer to pen their long-mooted *Fantastic Voyage* remake. Goyer has written a whole host of genre movies over the years, such as the Hoff-tastic Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., the *Blade* trilogy, Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, *Man of Steel* and *Da Vinci's Demons*. For those unfamiliar with the Richard Fleischer-directed 1966 original, it starred Raquel Welch, Stephen Boyd, Edmond O'Brien & Donald Pleasence, and told the story of a team of scientists who are shrunk down to atomic size and sent into a human body in a miniature submarine. The movie also spawned a popular Filmmation animated series, which ran for 17 episodes from 1968-1969. Though Lightstorm Entertainment will produce, it's not believed that its founder James Cameron will take the helm as Fox are believed to be making this a priority, which doesn't quite jibe with his plans to deliver *Avatar 2*, *Avatar 3* and *Avatar 4* in 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively. We're going to go out on a limb and predict his slate's a tad full at the moment.

Not content with reimagining this classic of the genre, Fox also has plans to reintroduce contemporary audiences to *Flash Gordon*, and have set Patrick McKay and J.D. Payne (a duo that are also penning the next *Star Trek* movie) to task on the update. The pair will be adapting the previous draft compiled by The Adjustment Bureau's George Nolfi. | AP

## FRIDAY THE 13TH

Not only has there been movement on the widely reported found footage style re-reboot this month – David Bruckner, he of *V/H/S* segment *Amateur Night*, will helm for a March 13th, 2015 release – but more interesting is the official announcement that, as teased last September, Jason Voorhees will indeed be taking his hatred of horny teens to the small screen. Creator and long time producer Sean S. Cunningham is behind the show, but has yet to reveal just what kind of approach it will take. Since last time we heard of the project it was going by the working title of *Crystal Lake Chronicles*, coupled with a few hints dropped regarding Jason's descendants and different time-periods, we'll wager this will walk a similar path to *Bates Motel*, elevating the town itself and our principal character's family ties to higher importance. With nothing to go off other than pure speculation, it's hard to know whether this is a good idea or bad, but recent shows such as *Hannibal* and the aforementioned *Psycho* spin-off have proven that it is possible to deliver fresh takes on franchises that have been diluted over the years. And let's face it, whatever they do with the Jason from here on in, it can't be any worse than the 2009 reboot. Or that one where he went to space. But Jason might

DENZEL  
WASHINGTON



Okay, so there's not really that much to be said about this first teaser poster for September's reboot of *The Equalizer*, but it does provide us with the opportunity to tell you that its co-star Chloë Grace Moretz has just landed the lead role in the big-screen adaptation of Rick Yancey's YA alien invasion novel, *The 5th Wave*. (That we clearly haven't read or we'd have given that news story its own spot.)

not be the only '80s slasher icon getting a new lease of life soon, with rumours abound that The Weinstein Company are looking to get back on track with the previously scrapped *Halloween 3D*. Unlike *Friday the 13th* however, the next outing for *The Shape* will likely be a straight continuation, with Scout Taylor-Compton heavily implying on Twitter she'll be reprising the role of Laurie Strode in Rob Zombie's previous installments. [Erm... Yay? – Ed]



Kids today don't know how lucky they are. Back in 1990, Michelangelo's nunchucks were completely cut from the UK version of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Katana swords and dual sai? No problem. Little bits of wood with a chain between 'em? The children must be protected at all costs!!!) Fast forward twenty-four years and they get their own teaser poster! Go figure.

## RONIN

Joining the legion of comic books being adapted for the big and small screen is Frank Miller's 1983 limited series. Telling the story of a dishonoured 13th century samurai brought to the 21st century to have the chance at redemption and taking down his master's reincarnated killer, **Ronin** will be developed into a miniseries by Syfy, although the project is still on the hunt for a writer and director right now.

Joining **Ronin** at Syfy will be two more comic book properties, Oni Press' **Letters 44** and Image's **Clone**. Adapted from the work of Charles Soule and Alberto Albuquerque, **Letters 44** has **Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines** director Jonathan Mostow already on board to write and direct the pilot. The story here follows Stephen Blades, newly elected as President, as he discovers that NASA actually happened upon an alien construction project seven years prior. As for **Clone**, this will be overseen by none other than **The Walking Dead**'s Robert Kirkman. Originally a graphic novel from David Schulner, central to **Clone** is retired soldier Luke Taylor. When a bloodied and battered look-a-like of himself turns up at his door, it soon becomes apparent that this is just one of a plethora of clones who are all after Taylor's wife and unborn child.

In other comic book adaptation news (yup, there's more!), John Layman and Rob Guillory's cannibal cop caper **Chew** is receiving the animated treatment, as is Ben Templesmith's **Wormwood: Gentleman Corpse**. To be directed by Jeff Krelitz, **Chew** will feature the vocal talents of **The Walking Dead**'s Steven Yeun and **The Guild**'s Felicia Day. It's also not to be completely ruled out that **Chew** will eventually be turned into a live-action movie at some point down the line. With **Wormwood**, the series is being developed by IDW Entertainment, Travieso Productions and Circle of Confusion. Telling the tale of an interdimensional worm who saves the world by possessing corpses, **Wormwood** could be something truly unique and appealing for genre fans, as could **Chew**, with its potty plot involving an FDA agent who solves crime via psychic messages delivered through taste!

And what would be a comic book roundup without an appearance from Mark Millar? This month brings word that his **MPH** title has been optioned by Lorenzo di Bonaventura (the **Transformers** franchise) for the movie treatment. Following on from the news that Millar's **Superior**, **Starlight** and **Nemesis** are all being developed for the big screen, **MPH** is on the hunt for a writer and a studio at this point. With the **MPH** book set to be released by Image on May 21st, the story focuses on four 19-year-olds who find themselves in possession of a new street drug that gives them the ability to move around at light-speed for a week. Before that, the next Millarworld title that hits the big screen will be **The Secret Service**, due for release in October. | AP

## V/H/S

Recent found-footage horror anthology series **V/H/S** is to get a third outing, with **V/H/S Viral** being ear-marked for a 2015 premiere. Though details are scarce, the loose 'concept' this time around will focus on fame-obsessed teens who end up becoming online sensations for all the wrong reasons. At this point, Epic Pictures will look to hawk the film at this month's Cannes Film Festival, with **The Collective** and **Bloody Disgusting** producing the threequel. The movie will feature segments directed by Todd Lincoln (**The Apparition**), Marcel Sarmiento (**Deadgirl**), Gregg Bishop (**Dance of the Dead**), Justin Benson (**Resolution**), Aaron Moorhead (**Dance of the Dead**) and Nacho Vigalondo (**Timecrimes**), with all of those having worked on the screenplay alongside TJ Cifmel (**No Tell Motel**) and Dave White.

With the popularity of this low budget franchise making Hollywood sit up and take note, Brad Pitt's Plan B Pictures, Brett Ratner's RatPac Entertainment and New Regency have teamed up to produce a very similar sounding project this month. Entitled **3 Videotapes**, the movie is cited as having elements of both **Ringu** and **Memento**. We guess they must have forgotten to mention **V/H/S** or **V/H/S 2**. Expect more information on both projects over the coming issues. | AP

## THE BFG

Fan of Roald Dahl? Fan of Steven Spielberg? If you answered yes to both, get ready to be very happy indeed, for the celebrated filmmaker has signed on to direct the live-action version of **The BFG**. Going even further to improve upon on that pairing, it's also been revealed that the script for this adaptation has been penned by Melissa Mathison, the writer behind Spielberg's **E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial**. At present, the plan is to begin shooting the movie next year with a 2016 release planned. (If you were tricked into reading this story thinking it was some kind of **Doom** reference, we offer our apologies.) | AP

## AND FINALLY...

Kevin Smith's low budget Xmas-themed anthology horror, **Comes the Krampus** (see TTC 398), has undergone a title change and will now be known as **Anti-Claus**. Development has also progressed significantly since it was last mentioned within these pages, with Christmas quite literally coming early for the cast of Smith's **Tusk**, as Justin Long, Haley Joel Osment, Genesis Rodriguez and Michael Parks will all be joining him on this movie too.

And speaking of the cult filmmaker's upcoming exercise in blubbery body horror, Johnny Depp has been revealed as the mystery **Tusk** cast member they were holding out for. Depp will return to his indie roots to play Guy Lapointe, a French-Canadian detective on a mission to uncover the truth behind the spate of mammal-based mutilations.

Remember when Universal were kicking around the idea of doing a reboot of **Battlestar Galactica** back in '09, despite the fact that Ronald D. Moore's critically acclaimed reboot of his own had only just finished on TV that very same year? Terrible idea. But terrible ideas are often Hollywood's stock in trade, and here we find ourselves talking about the unwanted project yet again. The studio now has Jack Paglen (**Transcendence**) on script duties and an ace up their sleeve in the form of Glen A. Larson himself. Can we really argue against another version of the property if it comes courtesy of the original creator? Okay, we've thought about it... Yes. Yes we can.

Staying with **BSG**, its Cylon star Tricia Helfer is returning to the genre in Syfy's new six-part series, **Ascension**. Written by **Smallville**'s Philip Levens, the show deals with the aftermath of a young girl's murder on board a heavily populated space ship during its hundred-year voyage to a new planet.

And they were doing so well. Syfy held the record for mentions in this edition of TTC, and all of them were in regards to projects we were looking forward to. But we draw the line at high-fiving them over their plans to inflict a third **Sharknado** flick on us in 2015.

Encouraged by the rapturous reaction to the recent three-and-a-half hour, \$200 a ticket, sold out live stage read of his scrapped western, **The Hateful Eight**, Quentin Tarantino has decided to proceed with the project after all. Expect the actors who took part in the one-time-only performance (Amber Tamblyn, Kurt Russell, Samuel L. Jackson, Walter Goggins, Tim Roth, Michael Madsen, Zoe Bell, Bruce Dern, James Remar, Dana Gourrier, Denis Ménochet and James Parks) to all make the transition in some capacity.

Just this month we've had new announcements of movies based on toys (**Barbie!**) and theme park rides (Disney's **It's a Small World**), so why not snacks too? In a first, **Peeps**, a US brand of tiny seasonal marshmallow candies, are making a bid for fame and fortune in a LEGO-esque big screen adventure. What next, **Monster Munch: The Movie**? (Actually, that could be a ace. Nobody nick that idea until we've talked to Walkers!)

TTC 401 stories by KRIS HEYS and ANDREW POLLARD. Edited by KRIS HEYS





# THE WAR HAS JUST BEGUN...

BY PETE TURNER



*The Autobots may have emerged victorious in DARK OF THE MOON's epic showdown, but come this summer, audiences will discover just how drastically the Battle of Chicago changed our robot protectors' universe forever. Because we couldn't wait until then, STARBURST adopted a Mikaela-esque pose and popped the hood on one of the biggest movies of the year...*



To Bay or not to Bay; that is very rarely the question. But so it was with the forthcoming fourth coming of the friendly Autobots and dastardly Decepticons when it was announced that the Transformers franchise would continue with or without the world famous explode-a-thon director. It's hardly a surprise producers Paramount and Hasbro were keen to see their much beloved toy line continue as a mind-bogglingly massive money making franchise on the big screen. If you thought everyone hated Michael Bay the director, think again. While most go to see a Transformers movie for the robots and explosions, Bay certainly knows how to bring the spectacle on an epic scale. Even Roland Emmerich might have a tough job blowing this much shit up. And Emmerich's films definitely don't pull in the same amount of punters as Bay's Transformers films have.

The trilogy which began back in 2007 has now netted more than \$2.6 billion worldwide. Despite increasingly negative reviews, the third instalment, *Dark of the Moon*, is now the seventh biggest film of all time at the worldwide box office. The brand recognition extends across the globe but it is undoubtedly helped by Michael Bay's eye for an explosive set piece or twenty. So it was very surprising to hear that Bay would be vacating the director's chair after completing his trilogy that started smashingly with *Transformers*, descended drastically with *Revenge of the Fallen* (but not in terms of box office dollars) before picking itself up and crushing naysayers with a true behemoth in *Dark of the Moon*. Bay went off to make his considerably less explosive, so-called 'small' (\$26 million budget) passion project *Pain and Gain* with Mark Wahlberg and it looked as though we might get to see the likes of Emmerich or someone similar take over on future films in the franchise.

Whether lured back by the prospect of a pay cheque the size of Unicorn or by some genuine desire to go even bigger and better than before, Bay did eventually sign on to return to the franchise after rumours began swirling in December 2012 that he was tempted. Bay says it was the two and a half hour long queues for the brand new Transformers ride at Universal Studios Hollywood







that convinced him to get back in the driving seat. With the studio saying they would be rebooting the franchise without him, Bay was eager to set a new trilogy off under his own direction and ensure his work on the original trio of films was not undone by some young buck with the public relations skills of Shia LaBeouf. Producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura announced Bay's return to the franchise and pretty soon it was revealed that *Transformers: Age of Extinction* would not be a reboot, but instead would feature a new cast and take place four years after the events of *Dark of the Moon*.

But with Shia LaBeouf moving onto plagiarism, paper bag-wearing red carpet appearances and possible retirement, who would fill the star shaped void left by himself, Megan Fox, Josh Duhamel and Tyrese Gibson? Rumours whispered that Jason Statham was being eyed for the lead role but perhaps his commitments to the increasingly mega franchise *Fast and Furious* put an end to that idea before it transformed into anything concrete. However, with Statham either unavailable or uninterested in spending some time battling giant robots, Bay didn't have to look far for someone to fill the boots of his main character Cade Yeager. Before *Pain and Gain* was even released, director Bay and star Mark Wahlberg decided that their time working together was not enough and a reunion was in order. In stepped Wahlberg to play the auto mechanic who finds Optimus Prime in considerably worse shape than he was last seen in the battle of Chicago four years earlier.

This being a *Transformers* movie though, where would it be without a pretty young lady drooped alluringly over a vehicle of some sort? Not put off by the Bay/Fox fall out, hot young actresses were lining up to take the female lead in *Age of Extinction* with Isabelle Cornish (Abbie's sister), Margaret Qualley (Andie MacDowell's daughter), Gabriella Wilde and Alex Frnka all being considered. However, the role of Wahlberg's teen daughter Tessa finally went to Nicola Peltz of the *Psycho* inspired TV series *Bates Motel*. She'll be giving Wahlberg anxiety attacks by hopping in and out of super fast cars with male lead Jack Reynor who plays her race driver boyfriend Shane Dyson. Bay speaks very highly of the 22-year old Reynor who beat back competition from Luke Grimes, Landon Libiron, Brenton Thwaites and Hunter Parrish. Reynor is coming off his first studio film *Delivery Man* (with Vince Vaughn) but it was the Irish drama *What Richard Did* that had Bay singing his praises and signing him up to co-star in his first giant blockbuster.

Cleary saving a bit of money on cheap young stars to blow it all on the effects budget is not Bay's only plan though. Rounding out the cast are Bay's usual mix of respected actors taking big paycheques for summer fun. Stanley Tucci and Kelsey Grammer have also joined *Age of Extinction*, with Tucci playing



Joshua, a designer who wants to build his own robots and Grammer taking human villain duties as Transformer-phobic government counter intelligence official Harold Attinger. Sophia Myles, Melanie Specht and Victoria Summer also take roles, all playing characters with ties to Tucci's Joshua. T.J. Miller (remember Hud the camera operator from *Cloverfield*?) will play Wahlberg's best friend and fellow mechanic, while on the side of the bad guys is *LOST*'s Titus Welliver (see page X). Emphasising that this will be a clean break from the original trilogy, don't expect cameos from the likes of LaBeouf or Fox. Instead, with *Transformers: Age of Extinction* aiming hard at the ever expanding Chinese market, some of the nation's biggest stars have been tapped to add to the film's appeal. Bingbing Li, the star of many Chinese films as well as *Resident Evil: Retribution* has a role and Han Geng, one of Asia's biggest pop stars will also be appearing. Not content with that, four Chinese actors have won roles in the film by being in a reality TV competition. Byron Li, Austin Lin, Candice Zhao and Teresa Daley all won parts through the *Transformers 4 Chinese Actors Talent Search Reality Show*, which was launched by the producers of the film. While not major roles (e.g. "sexy goddess", "computer geek"), it does show the sheer determination of Paramount to ensure that this film does even better than its predecessors in the increasingly important Chinese market.

After the success of *Iron Man 3* and its altered version especially tailored for Chinese audiences, the producers of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* have gone one step further. There will not be a specially edited version of the film for different territories, but Paramount Pictures enlisted the cooperation of the China Movie Channel and Jiaflex Enterprises in producing the film. As well as filming in Detroit and Michigan, Bay has taken the *Transformers* circus to China for the shooting of key scenes. Paramount's Chinese partners have helped secure a number of Chinese locations, as well as casting local talent and ensuring assistance with post-production and theatrical marketing. Due to the Chinese financing, *Age of Extinction* will also qualify as a co-production and therefore dodge the Chinese import quota, meaning bigger box office earnings can be made.

However, all these tales of harmonious Chinese cooperation are not quite the full story. It seems that even in China, there are those who are not big fans of Bay and his special brand of blockbuster mayhem, particularly not when he is filming right outside the door. In a widely reported incident, Bay was attacked on set and, depending on who you believe, fought back valiantly or just took a blow to the face before security stopped the attackers. Two brothers, Mak Chi-shing (27) and Mak Chi-hang (28) allegedly tried



GRIMLOCK



DINOBOT SLUG



SCORN



STRAFE



DINOBOT SLASH



to extort a location manager who wanted to film near to their air conditioning company's shop. The brothers demanded more and more compensation money to allow Bay and his crew to film there, eventually taking their desired sum up to HK\$100,000 (\$12,900). Funnily enough, their heavy handed tactics didn't work despite threats made to the location manager and sabotage tactics that included playing loud music from their shop and hitting objects to cause a racket. Going for broke, the brothers finally stormed on set to speak to Bay directly, demanding their sum. Bay wrote on his website "I personally told this man and his friends to forget it we were not going to let him extort us". Returning an hour later wielding a "long air conditioner unit" at the director's head, Bay claims the elder brother "walked right up to me and tried to smack my face, but I ducked, threw the air unit on the floor and pushed him away. That's when the security jumped on him." The brother then went for three police officers who attempted to intervene, biting them and lifting them off the ground. Sounds almost as exciting as the movie! Bay got an injury to the face but carried on like a trooper and the brothers were arrested and have now been sentenced to prison time.

So what have Bay and returning screenwriter Ehren Kruger got in store for TF fans this time around? Well, despite all involved





keeping pretty much everything on the down low, we do know it's not a reboot (as earlier feared) and that it's simply a continuation of the Transformers' story with new characters. Mark Wahlberg and his daughter are central players alongside the real stars of the film, the Autobots and Decepticons. When Wahlberg's mechanic Cade finds and activates an old and rusty Optimus Prime, it brings the paranoid and fearful anti-Transformer government down on them all hard, lead by Kelsey Grammer's Harold Attinger. With Tucci's character Joshua building his own robots in order to fight back if there is ever another Decepticon threat the likes of which they saw four years previously in Chicago, there will likely be man-made robots facing off with the Transformers we all know and love. From Paramount Pictures' existing preview footage, it looks as though Prime is in a bad way, riddled with bullet holes and with artillery shells falling out of his cab when Cade gets him back home. We've glimpsed Prime back in full health later in the story (and riding Dinobot Grimlock no less!) so Cade must help his rehabilitation and join the fight against a new batch of Decepticons, including Galvatron. He also gets his hands on some Cybertronian weaponry, leading to speculation that the Transformers home planet may be included properly for the first time in the Bay films.

With an all new human cast, there have also been some changes in the transforming stars of *Age of Extinction*. Peter Cullen returns to voice Optimus Prime who now transforms into a Western Star

4900 semi-truck and Bumblebee is also set to return, upgrading from a 1967 Camaro to a 2014 model. Alongside the old guard are a whole host of newbies making their big screen debut. In the red corner we have the likes of Hound, Crosshairs, Drift and possibly Slingshot joining the Autobots. Hound turns into an awesomely bulky tactical vehicle, Crosshairs a sexy sleek new Corvette Stingray, and Drift a Bugatti Veyron Grand Sport Vitesse. The cars have been shown off in a range of pictures but it's still to be seen how much of the characters from Transformers lore will remain with Bay's hands on them. Crosshairs should retain his specialism in weapons and Drift will likely still have his samurai sensibility but otherwise little is known.

In the blue corner for the Decepticons we have Lockdown, Stinger, Cyclonus, and big bad Galvatron. Lockdown transforms into a Lamborghini Aventador and will hopefully still be the malicious bounty hunter who steals parts from his defeated enemies and uses them to his own benefit. Most interestingly though, Galvatron looks to be picking up where Megatron left off in leading the Decepticons and transforms into a sinister silver Freightliner Argosy cab. Returning from the previous films will be Leadfoot, Ratchet and Brains, but more importantly will be newcomers the Dinobots. We've all seen Grimlock taking a pounding from Prime in the trailer as well as a brief glimpse of the flying Pteranodon Swoop, so expect the likes of Slag (sorry Slug), Sludge and Snarl to also make an appearance. As always, their loyalty to the Autobots







is likely to be dubious despite being creations of the Autobots themselves, but they will undoubtedly team up in fighting the bigger bad that threatens them all.

Fans who rang the phone number featured on the 'Remember Chicago' posters glimpsed in earlier *Age of Extinction* trailers were treated to a voicemail that reminds them of the danger of Transformers and the destruction that was caused by them. An accompanying website [www.TransformersAreDangerous.com](http://www.TransformersAreDangerous.com) featured a wanted poster for Optimus Prime showing just how feared and hated the Cybertronians have become since the events of *Dark of the Moon*. The new *Transformers: Rise of the Dark Spark* videogame is also expected to tie-in with the world of the films and add to the mythology being developed by Bay and the creative team behind the franchise.

Along with Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*, *Transformers: Age of Extinction* is one of the two films being released in full IMAX this year (the film is the first to be shot with full screen IMAX 3D cameras meaning that the experience should be positively overwhelming if you see it on the biggest screen you can find). The scope and scale of Bay's latest looks like it will even give the biggest of monsters, *Godzilla*, a run for his money come its release. Though Bay is again convinced that this will definitely be his last Transformer outing, many of the cast have signed on to three picture deals and *Age of Extinction* will be the first part in a new trilogy. There were rumours that *Transformers 4* and *5* were being shot back to back, but so far they've proven to be unfounded. However, a leaked Hasbro slideshow confirms that we can expect *Transformers 5* in 2017. If Bay really does stick to his guns this time around and bows out of the rest of the franchise, the all important question of 'to Bay or not to Bay' will finally be answered.

TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION hits UK cinemas July 10th.



*"For moviegoers all over the world, I guarantee this will take it up a notch. Michael Bay promised me it would be a very different, stand-alone movie, which it absolutely is. It is bigger and better than the other three combined. This will be the biggest movie of 2014. I really feel like it is probably the most iconic franchise in movie history."* - Mark Wahlberg







# THE MAN IN BLACK



*TITUS WELLIVER is best known to genre fans for playing a pivotal role in LOST's mythology, and most recently as the agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. Felix Blake in Marvel Studios' ITEM 47 and their titular ABC series. This summer the Connecticut born actor will become synonymous with yet another gigantic fantasy franchise, thanks to his villainous turn in TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION...*

**STARBURST:** What can you tell us about your character?

Titus Welliver: I play a man named James Savoy. He's a former Navy SEAL who now runs a paramilitary group, tasked with eliminating the remaining Transformers since they've been outlawed.

**This film has been described as a reboot of sorts, what do you think distinguishes Age of Extinction from the previous trilogy?**

I wouldn't exactly call it a reboot, simply a continuation of the Transformers saga. Yes there's an entirely new cast, not only of human characters, but some new Transformers as well. I think what's different from the previous films is while it still plays to its target audience of younger people, it has story elements that will be very appealing to adults as well.

**What did you find the most challenging aspect of the shoot?**

For me it was an extremely physical role. There was a lot of running, a lot of shooting

and dodging explosions. Also, I've never worked on a film of this scale before.

**Are we allowed to ask whether your character will return for further sequels?**  
I have no idea!

**Why do you think the Transformers franchise still appeals thirty years on?**

Heroic characters never grow tiresome for an audience. It's the substance of all good storytelling that makes it timeless.

**Is there any particular toy from your own childhood you'd like to see get the big-screen treatment?**

I was a huge fan of The Man from U.N.C.L.E. television series, and obsessively played with the toys from that franchise.

**You're in luck, the reboot's out next Jan! What projects have you got coming up next?**

I recently received news that the series pilot I shot, *Bosch*, for Amazon Prime has been picked up for a season and we go into production in late July.

**Congrats!**

Michael Connelly's novels have an enormous global appeal, and people are extremely passionate about them. I'm extremely thrilled to be given the opportunity to fully realise the character. We've assembled an amazing cast of actors, so I'm counting the minutes until we go into production.

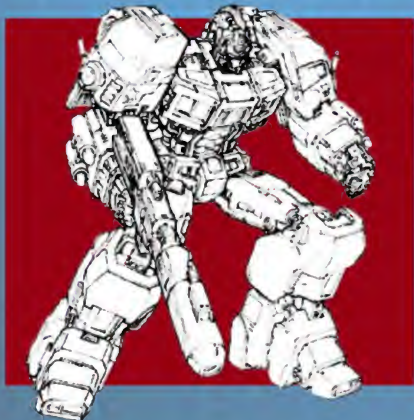




# FULL SERVICE HISTORY



BY JACK BOTTOMLEY



STARBURST raids its toy box to bring you the story of one of the most enduring action figure lines of all time...

**T**he Transformers brand is the product of Japan's Takara-Tomy (formerly Takara before the 2006 merge) company and Hasbro. Originally Hasbro were the American distributors for The Transformers but have since purchased the brand (with Takara distributing in the Japanese market). Under the Hasbro chassis, the Transformers became a source of fiddly affection, with the toys' shape-shifting and creative quality chiming with audiences worldwide. The war between the Autobots and Decepticons (Cybertrons and Destrons in Japan) has been a shelf war since before 1980s!

There have been over 50 different toy lines to date and there aren't any signs of the Transformers returning to Cybertron any time soon. The toyline really began way back in the 1970s with Takara's articulated (multiple jointed/interchangeable parts) toys, which made up the Microman series. The Microman line, which actually exists to this day (after its resurgence in 1999), would undergo many transitions before becoming Transformers. In 1972, Takara created 12" figures called Henshin Cyborgs, which acted as a licensed spin-off from Hasbro's Combat Joe line. However, costs forced Takara to go smaller (generally 3.75") and Microman toys were born in 1974.

The Microman line shared similarities with the later Transformers toyline (they hailed from "Micro Earth", they 'disguised themselves' as toys, they had a transforming aspect to them, need we go on?), so their evolution was almost inevitable. Microman, renamed Micronauts by the Mego Corporation, hit America in 1976 and Mego hoped to have the line compete with the vast success of *Star Wars* toys (which they'd unwisely rejected to license). However, the Micronauts were discontinued in 1980 and Mego went bankrupt, ending production in 1983. Despite this, the Microman line was alive and well in Japan and in 1981, to engage a younger audience, Takana recharged the series. New Microman was created, altering the mythology and, in turn, leading to a more transformable toy. Takana also created the half-inch high Diaclone series, an offshoot of New Microman, however, when Transformers finally debuted, both series were finished.



In the beginning there was Microman...



In 1984, Hasbro purchased the rights to these 'Micro Change' toys and Diaclone and worked with Marvel comics (is there anything Marvel hasn't been involved in?) to create a story for this combined toyline, that they renamed the Transformers. Many of the Micromaster line would actually become part of Transformers and Takana continued to push Diaclone until finally debuting Transformers in 1985, a year after the US, Canada and the UK.

## GENERATION ONE

The Transformers toyline began with what is now known as Generation One (G1) and emphasised the success that was capable from the brand. The characters have all become a popular entity in the history of toys and their impact on culture. The G1 line introduced a number of enduring brand concepts from packages showing character's robot forms to bios, as well as other aspects that didn't last - Robot Points anyone? Products like Autobot leader Optimus Prime, the Deception planes Starscream, ThunderCracker, Skywarp and the hugely popular Autobot car Prowl were among those that retailers struggled to keep on their shelves back in 1984. Within only a year

there were many notable expansions of the Transformers-verse, including the introduction of the Dinobots (see page 34) and the evil Insecticons. Takana/Hasbro essentially used already-designed molds for G1, but by 1986 were using the last of them and opened up to even more original sets and characters.

*The Transformers: The Movie* opened in 1986, leading to brand new products based on the film. 1986 was dominated somewhat by the film and television series (1984-87), which had been drawing more into this world since the start. This led to 1986 products taking a futuristic approach (thanks to the film/third series being set way in the far flung future of 2005!), which was weird considering the brand was built on robots being in disguise... as every day vehicles/objects. By 1987 the Headmasters and Targetmasters (the good and bad guys respectively) lines became the next big step, due to their ambitious construction (two foot tall and cost the equivalent of \$100!), as well as the introduction of the Throttlebots (that replaced the Mini-Vehicles). More and more sub-lines opened, with Powermasters (Optimus Prime transformed into engines) being introduced and even more incarnations of these lines opening up (confused yet?)

1988 saw a much more emphatic change that was the beginning of the end... for G1 at least. Transformers was given a new logo and a new tagline ("More... MUCH more than meets the eye" - hmm) and introduced its most controversial line of toys, the

Pretenders. The Pretenders were the first non-transforming/simplistic-transforming toys of the series and their vehicle modes had little articulation. The Pretenders did bring back 1984/85 characters in a different form but came 1989 there were only two sub-lines: The Pretenders and the one inch-tall Micromasters (made to compete with Galoob's Micro Machines series). Many considered this the end of the (toy)line and came the ill-fated Action Masters toys (non-transforming figures - yes, non-transforming transformers are a thing!) the brand lost focus. The Transformers line became inactive in 1990 in the US, although Canada, UK and Japan continued the Transformers lines (some call this Generation 1.5) and led to the output of Generation Two.

## GENERATION TWO AND BEYOND

Generation Two arrived in late 1993 (US) (1994 for the UK) and re-used 1984/85 moulds entirely, altering colour schemes and accessories of previously existing models. In fact, for the first year of production no new characters were created. Deception leader Megatron was re-released as part of G2 (only his famed G1 handgun transformation identity was





changed to a tank for safety – which is ironic). Sales largely disappointed for G2 and the line was discarded in the States, but in 1995 the series got back on track by going off track, with the success of The Beast Wars and Beast Machines.

The Beast Wars toyline was debuted in autumn 1995, accompanied by a new animated series, *Beast Wars: Transformers* (1996-1999), and was an international hit. The direction saw the figures transforming into robotic animals, as opposed to vehicles. The Autobots and Decepticons became the Maximals and Predacons, and the series somewhat rejuvenated the brand with a fresh mythology. Although this did mean that certain audiences refused to acknowledge it as an extension of the G1 heyday, *Beast Wars* (renamed *Beasties* in some territories due to the term 'war' being a no-no) success led to the Beast Machines line that had a very different look (translucent plastic and chrome finishes). Sadly, the line had issues with scaling and accuracy to the TV show. For instance, the character of Nightcream is the show's second-smallest character, but his toy was vast.

In the face of *Star Wars: Episode I* and some financial issues, a rejig was needed. Takana's Japanese toyline, *Car Wars*, was brought in and rebranded as *Transformers: Robots in Disguise* (as was its 2000 anime show). In turn, *Transformers* went back to the robots/vehicles format. Many regard the *Robots in Disguise* line as filler until the next real evolution of the franchise was

decided. However, the toys were met with varying degrees of success (high sales meant they had to re-use molds from every *Transformers* line).

## THE UNICRON TRILOGY

In 2002 the next line of toys, *Transformers: Armada*, arrived alongside a cartoon series of the same name. *Armada* changed the intricate toys of the last few lines and went back to basics, creating a new universe. *Armada* was the first part of what is called 'The Unicorn Trilogy', which is a group of timelines that continue on from one another, named after the planet-sized baddie of the 1986 film. The distinguishing feature of *Armada* was the addition of the Mini-Cons (human-sized transformers capable of linking to bigger Transformers to give extra abilities). *Armada* was successful at bringing back interest and rewarding longtime fans.

Also in 2002 (and still running now) The *Transformers: Universe* line was started, with a purpose of re-releasing and newly painting figures from across past toy lines. *Universe* is similar to the likes of *Transformers: Masterpiece* (2003) and *Transformers: Generations* (2010-now) in this regard. However, the next in the Unicorn Trilogy was *Transformers: Energon* and (like *Armada*) it came with a cartoon series (2004-05) and a Dreamwave Productions comic. While taking the G1 homages further, the *Energon* toyline was not without its fresh machinations. The line

introduced two new groups: the Omnicons and Terrorcons (subgroups of the Autobots and Decepticons, respectively).

This led to an expansion of the *Transformers* universe and onto the final part of the Unicorn Trilogy, in 2005's *Transformers: Cybertron* line. *Cybertron* was accompanied by a 2005-06 animated show and 2005 manga series. The show was not originally intended as a follow-up, which created specific inconsistencies; all the same *Cybertron* boasted a new aspect for the products in Cyber Keys. These Cyber Keys activated new abilities on the figures (similar to the upgrade effect of Mini-Cons in *Armada*) and were fundamental to the plot of the anime series. *Cybertron* may have concluded the Unicorn Trilogy, but Hasbro/Takara (now Takara-Tomy) had more in their *Transformers* lines to come, and the only way was up after a successful run.

## FROM FILM TO SHELF

On the way to the next line of toys, there was a more adult collection of products in the 2006 Japan-only *Transformers: Kiss Players*. This highly suspect toyline was set in an alternate universe where Transformers are powered by young girl's kisses (yes, really) and the story was told via manga and radio plays. Needless to say, the 2007 toyline based on Michael Bay's live-action motion picture (which Hasbro was heavily involved in) was far broader (and a lot less creepy!). The new designs of the Transformers, as well as Bay's alien invader approach to the









material, split franchise fans. Some hated the new tech-heavy look and others felt that it moved with the times. The films have been polarisingly received but the toys and merchandising aspects have been amplified as a result of their releases.

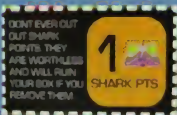
In 2008 the *Transformers: Animated* line of products debuted, in parallel with the brand new TV show (2007-2009). Before that, the *Star Wars Transformers* were launched in 2006, which gave a transformative spin to popular characters from George Lucas' space saga. This line would ultimately be revived in 2008 as part of the *Transformers Crossover* series, which has products referencing the *Marvel* superheroes. As well as these, there were sets like the 2010 *Transformers: Power Core Combiners* series, influenced by the *Targetmasters* and *Mini-Cons*.

So, after all this cybertronian gobbledeygook, mind-melting detail and cross-cultural pond jumping, we'll forgive you for being a bit bamboozled.

The *Transformers* have appropriately changed form plenty over the brand's history. Hasbro and Takara-Tomy have taken changing robots and created a vibrant fanbase that goes far deeper than many of you may have imagined. From taking the shape of Ford Mustangs and futuristic transport to shifting shape into dinosaurs, large animals and even taking the form of Disney characters (in Takara-Tomy's Japanese 2009 Disney Label range) - the *Transformers* have changed face more times than the Doctor! The Autobots vs Decepticons conflict has been vastly expanded and developed by its toy lines. However, at its core, this is a story of good and evil, which has connected with the childhood necessity for imagining and creating, and with more films/products planned, this story is far from over. To borrow a line from *The Transformers: The Movie*, "the galaxy-spanning adventures of the *Transformers* will continue and the greatest Autobot of them all - Optimus Prime - will return."



TRANSFORMERS: KISS PLAYERS  
Transformers powered by  
the kisses of  
VERY young girls...



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# TRANSFORMING SATURDAY MORNINGS

WORDS & DESIGN:  
GRANT KEMPSTER

It is the year 2014, and while the children of today aren't zooming around on hover boards for thrills (technically that's next year) they do have the next best thing: TV. Yes, the screen that has sat in the corner of living rooms around the world since the 1950s (maturing from a chunky overweight baby to a sleek and sexy adult) continues to enthrall young audiences with countless hours of children's programming. But it wasn't always that way. STARBURST finds out why...



**T**here was a time when finding quality kids TV was like trying to unearth a needle in a Giant Haystack. But, if you knew when and where to look, you were in for a treat. That time was the 1980s: the golden age of Saturday morning TV, and holding the torch in their mammoth metal hands, was a fleet of alien robots that liked nothing better than to dress up as a variety of vehicles. They were new, they were exciting, they were the Transformers. When the series first aired in September of 1984, (UK audiences would have to wait until 1985 to see Hasbro's finest interrupt Roland Rat's inane 'Fonzie with a stroke' brand of presenting), audience expectations were simple. After all, here was a 30-minute cartoon that was essentially an elongated advert for toys. But the coalition behind the animated series (which included Sunbow, toy-makers Hasbro and even Marvel) knew exactly what they were doing.

A year prior to the emergence of Optimus Prime and co, another cartoon snuck onto screens across the world and set a new precedent.

Not only was *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* a gaudy promotion for Mattel's toys, it was actually derived from them. For the first time, the merchandise was driving Saturday morning cartoons and that changed everything.

With the 'more than meets the eye' concept already in place, a simple (yet timeless) story was put together. Having fallen to Earth, remnants of an endless war on their own world, the Transformers continue their eternal struggle, with the evil faction vying for world domination, while the good guys do their best to stop them. And frankly, that summed up the first 49 episodes. But then something amazing happened.

Having witnessed the unabashed devotion to brand Transformers, Hasbro decided to break new ground themselves by creating a theatrical animated movie. With a story and everything! Granted, writer Ron Friedman opted for the tried-and-tested 'hero's journey' tale, but such creative laziness was practically imperceptible next to the kinetic animation, brand new characters and rousing (if deliciously cheesy) soft rock soundtrack.



## NOW THAT'S PRIME

While *Transformers* has had more facelifts than Jackie Stallone, one element has always been in evidence: **OPTIMUS PRIME**.

## TRANSFORMERS: GENERATION 1

Voiced by: Peter Cullen.

Transformed into:  
Kenworth K100 cab over truck.





*Transformers: The Movie* didn't just prove to be a popular summer movie; it also changed the game for the subsequent third season of the TV show, although at a cost. Having taken the gamble of killing off the series' lead characters in the movie, the third season forged ahead with its new cast and decided to do something else original. It created a plot arc.

By examining the origins of the Transformers' creation (culminating in the much anticipated return of Optimus Prime), the series attempted to deliver a little big-screen storytelling to 'small-screen' audiences. It was a bold move, but perhaps it was either too much for the tiny children's brains, or maybe the audience the franchise had nurtured had moved on to pastures new. Whatever the reason, what is affectionately now known of as Generation One ended three episodes into its fourth season.

Well, we say ended. As you'll notice as you read on, while it might have seemed like Transformers stayed in hiding until Michael Bay spurted them back onto the screen 20 years later, this is certainly not the case. In fact, to be honest, they've hardly left our screens (presuming you'd spent a large portion of the late '80s in Japan, that is).

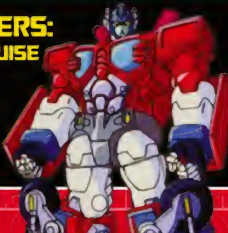
In essence, the animated story continued thanks to Japanese manufacturer Takara who took it upon themselves to breathe new life into the franchise with the advent of the slightly trippy *Headmasters* (weeny little Cybertronians who become the heads to their Transsector body units).



## TRANSFORMERS: ROBOTS IN DISGUISE

Voiced by: Neil Kaplan.

Transformed into:  
Fire Engine.



## TRANSFORMERS: ARMADA

Voiced by: Gary Chalk.

Transformed into:  
Monster Truck.







The 35-episode run was, however, limited purely to Japanese television, and while it included characters we had come to know and love, it somehow managed to abuse their memory, sending off Rodimus to pastures new and killing off Prime again just for kicks.

If *Transformers: The Headmasters* seemed to distort our cherished memory, then what came next would provide the televisual equivalent of an acid nightmare. *Transformers: Super-God/Chojin Masterforce* (yes, that was its actual name), turned the dial up to 11 and didn't just jump the shark, it orbited the thing. Having already introduced us to mini robots in *Headmasters*, Takara decided to go one better and give us Autobots and Decepticons that were parading around as humans. But wait, it gets better. Before long humans get in on the action, melding with Transformers to become super robot life forms known as Godmasters. There were 43 episodes of this mental monstrosity.

If only it ended there. Hanging around like the psycho-ex who won't take a hint, Takara insisted on re-envisioning the show one final time with *Transformers: Victory* which, interestingly enough, decided to stop all the crazy robot/human penetration and go back-to-basics with stand-alone episodes. The continuing slew of merchandise managed to sustain this for a 32 episode run (not counting the six clip shows), but it couldn't carry their next project, *Transformers: Zone*, which didn't make it past one episode.

If the Transformers foray into Japanese surrealist story telling had proven anything, it was that the show seemed to work best when it was at its simplest. But it was a lesson learned too late, and it would be six years (not counting the pathetic attempt to reskin the Generation One series with dodgy CG) before we would see Prime on the small screen again. Although this time he would be a monkey.

In 1996, the concept of a reboot was almost unheard of and having had the franchise worked into a corner by Takara, Hasbro could only see one way forward for their ailing commodity: turn them into animals. Thus, *Transformers: Beast Wars* was born, featuring some familiar names but very unfamiliar forms, this time in all-new and exciting CGI! Over three seasons (totalling 52 episodes) the show not only gathered a strong core audience (mainly by retracing the footsteps of the original 1980s series),



## TRANSFORMERS: ENERGON

Voiced by: Gary Chalk.

Transformed into:  
Truck akin to the Kenworth.



## TRANSFORMERS: CYBERTRON

Voiced by: Gary Chalk.

Transformed into:  
Fire Engine! Again!





# AUTOBABIES ROLL OUT



Over the years there have been a few attempts to inject Transformers like a booster shot into the hearts and minds of pre-schoolers. First came *Transformers: Go-Bots*. It fared well enough to spawn a toy line courtesy of Playskool but never made the all-important transition to mainstream TV.

Performing much better is *Transformers: Rescue Bots*, which features all pre-schoolers favourite nee-naws as transforming robots (with a little Prime and Bumblebee occasionally thrown in for good measure). The show is currently in its second season.

but also belied its initial brief of distancing itself completely from the Generation One canon, by thrusting its characters into the original story's timeline for the finale.

Chiming in the new millennium and following hot on the heels of *Beast Wars'* unexpected success was *Transformers: Beast Machines*. But this was no straight continuation. This self-professed 'religious epic' attempted to add gravitas to the story once more, ignoring the portent of previous incarnations, not to mention alienating hardcore fans by suggesting that Cybertron was once an organic planet. Unsurprisingly, this fared less well and once again sunk the franchise's small screen exploits. At least as far as the Western world was concerned. Yes, that's right, those cheeky chaps at Takara had been working their magic again behind the scenes.

Lets keep the tales of their two cel-animated *Beast Wars* series – *Beast Wars II* and *Beast Wars: Neo* – short (both of which were produced to plug the gaps between air dates of the CGI show in Japan). Suffice to say, they bore little resemblance to the successful Western series – with the small exception of a crossover which featured in a theatrically released movie – but proved popular enough to run for 78 episodes collectively.



## TRANSFORMERS: BEAST WARS

Voiced by: Gary Chalk.

Transformed into:  
Gorilla.



Like so many multi-faceted franchises that endure due to their unexpected success, 16 years into its lifespan *Transformers* found itself at breaking point. Unable to move forward in new directions or evolve into new unexplored forms (I don't think anyone was ready for *Transformers: Badger Force*), Takara and Hasbro finally made the decision to reset the clock. Thus, *Transformers: Robots in Disguise* was born. It didn't last long though, managing just one season. Yet, while this incarnation of the Autobots and Decepticon's epic war may not have hit the right note with fans old and new, it opened the door to the idea that not every incarnation needed to co-exist. Finally, Transformers had room to breathe creatively and while Takara and Hasbro's next project might not have made the same waves as their 1984 counterpart, they certainly paved the way towards its return to success.

Known by fans as the Unicron trilogy, *Transformers: Armada*, *Transformers: Energon* and *Transformers: Cybertron* once again rebooted the story, creating a 30-year story arc that saw the return of their planetary foe as well as nods to previous incarnations of the series. For the first time since the Generation One show ceased in the mid 1980s, Transformers as we once knew them were back in the mainstream eye, both on screen and in toy shops around the world.

## TRANSFORMERS: BEAST MACHINES

Voiced by: Gary Chalk.

Transformed into:  
Optimal Optimus sort of lying down with his arms out.



While the Unicron trilogy served to reintroduce a new generation to the metamorphosing mayhem that is Transformers, the uneasy alliance of cell animation and the blossoming art of computer animation didn't go down so well, so when it came time to once again breathe life into the franchise's spark, Cartoon Network went back to basics... and kept on going.

Rather than attempting to compliment Bay's newly arrived cinematic adventures, Hasbro and CN crafted a significantly more cartoonish look for their glorious ode to Generation One that returned to the roots of the original show. By appealing to fans of the original show (who would by now most likely be watching with their own kids), *Transformers: Animated* proved to be very popular with audiences old and new. Although it would appear that there was still something missing? Michael Bay's first Transformers movie had pulled in over \$700 million by captivating mainstream audiences as well as the hardcore fan base, but those audiences clearly weren't tuning in to watch the show.

After ratings took a terminal dip, *Transformers: Animated* reluctantly packed up its belongings and headed back to the drawing board. What came next will surprise no one.

*Transformers: Prime* became everything that *Animated* had failed to be: slick, kinetic and ultimately Baytastic. Employing full-on CG and taking the look and feel of the movie series as a template, the most recent incarnation of Transformers has become arguably the most successful incarnation since the show's debut 30 years ago, pulling in mass audiences and fans of all ages alike. Like its originator, it reset the clock, retelling the tale (in a similar way to the films although not incorporating them) of the Autobot vs Deception war. It also brought Peter Cullen and Frank Welker back to voice Optimus Prime and Megatron respectively, ensuring that the fan base tuned in.

Having created 65 episodes to date, the show continues to go from strength to strength (yes, they even made a movie, albeit a small-screen one), which is hardly surprising. What Transformers has learnt over the 30 years that it has been on our screens, is that in order to survive it needs to roll with the punches, evolving to suit the market and never be afraid to start again if things go a bit, well, Takara. With modern-day storytelling, it's unlikely that we'll ever see another show that spins round in circles as the Generation One show did, but with any luck, *Prime* will continue to strike the right balance to keep fans grinning for a while to come. Besides, no matter what, we all love robots that change into stuff. And as long as the story is simple enough for the kids to follow yet engaging enough to keep them watching, Hasbro will continue rolling them out.



## TRANSFORMERS: ANIMATED

Voiced by: David Kaye.

Transformed into:  
Futuristic truck-come-fire-engine.



## TRANSFORMERS: PRIME

Voiced by: Peter Cullen.

Transformed into:  
Peterbilt Model 379 truck.





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# MYTHOLOGY IN DISGUISE:

## A COMIC BOOK HISTORY

by Kal Shanahan



**T**he turbulent publication history of the Transformers comic series is close to being a point of pride for all TF fans, who carry their despair on their shoulders like Cybertronian Medals of Valour. Though there have been three major publishers to hold the rights to, and publish TF comic books, the last thirty years have seen as many as eight publishers stake claim to the Robots in Disguise.

As a result of the stop-start nature of the series, the TF Universe experiences more event horizons of storytelling than perhaps any other narrative based medium there is; which is a testament to both the passion of the fans and the respect the series is given at the editorial level. What follows is a trip into the history of that world (which may or may not be Earth-616), a world which, much like the Transformers themselves, has been an ever-changing and constantly evolving battlefield...

**MARVEL COMICS (SEPT 1984 – JULY 1991, NOV 1993 – OCT 1994)**

The Transformers debuted in late 1984, in what was originally a four issue miniseries simply titled "The Transformers". Scripted by Ralph Macchio (#1-2) and Jim Salicrup (#3-4) from a Bill Mantlo story, and pencilled by Frank Springer, the run introduced the core components of what would become the Transformer mythology for many decades to come.

Though the comic started in conjunction with the widely successful animated show, the two did not always care to share continuity. Where the show began with the evacuation of a near critical Cybertron and the Transformers going in search of alternative energy sources, the initial issues

told the now familiar story of both the Autobots and Decepticons crash landing on a prehistoric Earth before being awoken in then-present day 1985.

It is not long after the Ark (the Autobot ship) assigns each TF a vehicular disguise mode that the Decepticons begin to bleed the Earth dry of her natural resources – invoking the fury of the humans and challenging the courage of the seriously outmatched Autobots.

After a brief run in with Spider-Man (issue #3 seems to suggest the Earth-616 continuity) Megatron and the Decepticons seem to be on the verge of defeating the Autobots and claiming ownership of their new planet, until their previously imprisoned mechanic, and former US Marine, Sparkplug Witwicky, devises a way to poison the Decepticons' fuel supply.

The Autobots manage to take the fight and enjoy their victory for a few measly panels until Shockwave – the Decepticon charged with guarding the dormant Nemesis (the post factum named warship) – returns, destroying the Autobots with a "thirty-five foot-long ray gun".

Though the dire conclusion sees Optimus and his soldiers in literal pieces, the initial issues proved to be so successful that the book was picked up for an ongoing series. Eventually going on to produce 80 issues featuring some of the most famous Transformers stories, the series was retroactively classified and became more well known as the Generation One run.

The newly launched Marvel series went to press 3 months after the original miniseries ended, and began with Shockwave overthrowing the poisoned Megatron as leader of the Decepticons and taking total control of the non-functioning Autobots. Optimus Prime, his body destroyed, manages to smuggle the Creation Matrix (not to be confused with the Matrix of Leadership seen in 1987's *The Transformers: The Movie*) to Buster Witwicky and out of the reach of the now near-omnipotent Shockwave. Ratchet,



one of the last surviving Autobots, heads to the Savage Land (Earth-616), the last known location of the Dinobots, in order to awaken them and use them in the fight against Shockwave.

In a somewhat editorial misstep, Shockwave is able to create his first new generation of Decepticons without the Creation Matrix, as the Constructions are brought to life. The Autobots storm the new Decepticon base of operations and take back the head of Optimus, and with help from Buster Witwicky, Prime soundly defeats Shockwave, banishing him to the bottom of a swamp.

The series continues to have a strong human presence well into issue #24, where the book starts to mimic the animated series and movie in hopes of achieving another level of success. Cornerstone characters were suddenly and bleakly killed off without remorse, as Bumblebee, Optimus Prime, and Megatron all meet their end within issues of one another. Though they all eventually returned (because why wouldn't you save Optimus Prime's personality to a floppy disc?), the issues marked a darker and more serious change in direction.

The early 1990s ventured a little further into the galaxy, as the Autobots and Decepticons united forces to stage a final battle against the Universe-devouring, Orson Welles-less Unicron. The collaboration, though successful in defeating Unicron, was incredibly short lived as the Decepticons looked to take advantage of an Optimus-less Autobots and destroy their foes once and for all. Prime however, whose soul had become one with the 'Hi-Q' Cybertron's operating system - is resurrected by The Last Autobot, a God-like guardian of Cybertron, just in time to turn the tides of the final Transformers battle. Victorious, the Autobots finally return to Cybertron whilst the Decepticons are exiled to the furthest reaches of space.

The Gen One run was cancelled shortly after the battle with Unicron, and so whilst there were a few unresolved plot points after the final Autobot/Decepticon showdown, the writers were able to reuse the ideas in later incarnations. Though longtime editor Bob Budiansky had initially took over writing duties on Gen One, it

was Marvel UK writer Simon Furman who finished out the series, earning rave reviews and strong sales off the back of his mature and more sci-fi themed stories.

Issue #80 was the final issue of the Marvel TF Generation One series.

There was a short lived, 12 issue Marvel run aptly titled *Transformers: Generation Two*, released late 1993, that sought to combine the old Gen One characters with original 'bots. Taking place shortly after the climatic events of issue #80, the Autobots meet the Cybertronians, a race of Transformer not aligned with either Autobot nor Decepticon, and the mysterious Swarm, particles of black energy engulfing the galaxy. Other highlights include Megatron being rebuilt on Earth by COBRA of G.I. Joe fame!

#### MARVEL UK (SEPT 1984 - JULY 1992)

Though the UK Transformers series started off as a US reprint, the UK's predisposition to biweekly release windows meant that writers were eventually hired to add original content for the British issues. Whilst initially tied to the continuity of the US series, the release of *The Transformers: The Movie* in 1987, and the subsequent disregarding of the new characters in the US books, meant that the UK series gained a little leeway in their continuity.

The UK series ran for an astonishing 332 issues, having been given more time to develop the back stories and origins of characters introduced in the US prints.

Simon Furman was the principle writer for almost all of the UK series, even continuing the series once he had taken over writing duties on the US Transformers comic also. His capacity for crafting encompassing sagas has continued to tie him to almost every iteration of the Transformers comic books.

#### DREAMWAVE PRODUCTIONS (APRIL 2002 - JAN 2005)

Initially an imprint of Image Comics, Dreamwave Productions went their separate way in early 2002 and immediately purchased the licence for the Transformers comics from parent company Hasbro, before debuting their first issue in April 2002.



Launching concurrent publications - a Generation One-based miniseries in addition to a monthly *Transformers: Armada* book - was an aggressive move by DWP, and although the first miniseries, entitled *Prime Directive* was met with only middling critical praise, it proved to be a massive commercial success.

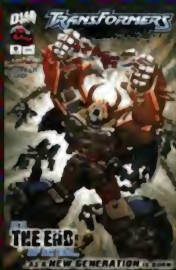
*War and Peace* was the next Gen One miniseries released and posted similar sales figures to its predecessors, prompting DWP to upgrade the miniseries to an ongoing comic focusing on the TFs stuck on Earth. Though Dreamwave's eventual bankruptcy resulted in the ongoing series being cancelled after issue #10, they had already produced three other miniseries exploring previously untouched Cybertronian ground.

*The War Within* saw Simon Furman return to the TF Universe in a 6 issue prequel series focusing on the Cybertronian Civil War and the subsequent rise to leadership of one Optimus Prime. The series proved so popular that a second volume, famous for introducing *The Fallen*, one of the original Primes, was released to much fanfare. A third volume was planned but left uncompleted when DWP closed their doors.

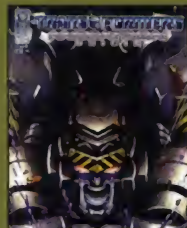
Their monthly book *Transformers:*







## TOP 10 COMIC ARCS



1. MEGATRON: ORIGIN (IDW, 2007)
2. THE TRANSFORMERS #01 - #04 (MARVEL, 1984)
3. THE WAR WITHIN (DREAMWAVE, 2002)
4. TARGET: 2006 (MARVEL UK, 1986)
5. THE LAST STAND OF THE WRECKERS (IDW, 2010)
6. ALL HAIL MEGATRON (IDW, 2008)
7. ENEMY ACTION! (MARVEL UK, 1988)
8. GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN! (MARVEL, 1986)
9. TOTALED! (MARVEL, 1988)
10. THE NEW AVENGERS / THE TRANSFORMERS (AEL/IDW, 2007)

*Armada*, forged its own continuity and focused again on areas of the TF mythology not seen before. The book fleshed out the origin of the Mini-Cons, small, human sized Transformers, and introduced the powerlinx concept; the combination of a Mini-Con with a larger Transformer for the gain of extra abilities. As the series started to conclude, Gen One character cameos became more and more frequent through the use of time travel and cross-dimensional adventure – the final issues once again centred on the incoming Unicron.

*Armada* was relaunched after issue #18 as *Transformers: Energon*. Once again scribed by Simon Furman, *Energon* dealt with the aftermath of Unicron's defeat in #18 and the disappearance of Megatron. Further characters were introduced into TF folklore, such as the Terrorcons, Omnicons and the principal characters Optimus Prime and Hot Shot receiving their new Energon Powerlinx bodies. The series was building toward a Terrorcon war on Earth and had just finished an arc which saw Optimus Prime help rebuild Megatron, when the series was cancelled due to DWP's bankruptcy.

## IDW PUBLISHING (OCT 2005 – PRESENT)

When Dreamwave Productions declared bankruptcy in January 2005, Chris Ryall, then Editor-in-Chief of IDW Publishing was one of the first to bid for the Transformers licence. Months later, Hasbro announced they had sold the licensing rights to IDW, who had a plan to reboot the series continuity with Issue #0. Taking cues from Marvel's Ultimate line, IDW both updated and reimagined many Gen One characters under the tutelage of Simon Furman, hired again for his unrelenting passion and vision for the world. Issue #0 broke records for IDW at the time, selling over 100,000 pre-order copies.

IDW began their Transformers series as a collection of miniseries, the first of which, *Infiltration*, not only maligned Optimus Prime and Megatron, but also eliminated one of the fundamental narratives of the Transformer origin, the Ark crash landing on Earth being written

out. *Stormbringer* followed the series, and with Cybertron as the focal point of the issues seemingly corrected the missteps of the first miniseries. Similarly, the next arc, *Escalation*, brought back Optimus Prime as the central protagonist and Megatron as his antagonist, ushering in a new era of success for IDW.

Eric Holmes penned the four-issue prequel series *Megatron: Origin* in June 2007 to great critical acclaim. The series focused on the early days of the Civil War on Cybertron, detailing the rise of Megatron from Energon miner to underground gladiator to leader of the Decepticons, and the fall of Optimus' predecessor Sentinel Prime.

Furman returned to writing duties for the next miniseries, *Transformers: Devastation*, which introduces a reimagined Galvatron as a wholly separate character to Megatron.

In a rare inter-company publication crossover, IDW and Marvel teamed up in July 2007 to present *New Avengers/Transformers*. The four part miniseries opened with the Earth's Mightiest





Heroes investigating an alien structure in Latveria, only to be ambushed by Doctor Doom and the Decepticons, who promptly capture Spider-Man. Optimus Prime and the Autobots intervene shortly after, and interlinking with both Wolverine and Spidey, are able to enhance their abilities long enough to soundly defeat the Decepticons.

All Hail Megatron began in July 2008 and followed the now Earth-ruling Decepticons in a decidedly darker comic run. Lasting for sixteen issues, the series paralleled post-revolutionary Communist propaganda and touched upon ideas of nuclear escalation prevalent during the Cold War.

September 2010 saw the series return to Earth as a rift in the Autobot ranks causes Optimus Prime to surrender leadership in the wake of two separate factions. Hot Rod, now having taken the Rodimus moniker, leads one group, whilst the other elect Bumblebee into power. Rodimus makes a temporary alliance with the banished-from-Earth Decepticons in the hopes of building an Ark to return all TFs to Cybertron, though the Decepticons, momentarily without a leader, are besieged by constant usurping. The power vacuum eventually leads to the rebuilding of Megatron.

To mark the anniversaries of the Transformers' 30th year and IDW's recent comic relaunch, 2013 saw the beginning of their most ambitious TF event, *Dark Cybertron*. Harkening back to the original Gen One Marvel runs, *Dark Cybertron* saw the operatic designs of Shockwave, millions of years in the making, coming to fruition: his plan, to rebuild Cybertron and usher in the destruction of the Autobots and Decepticons.

In one of the most wide-reaching series in recent years, *Dark Cybertron* engulfs a number of IDW miniseries, and includes TF characters from both the past and present coming together to battle Shockwave. After the deaths of Bumblebee and Galvatron, Megatron dons an Autobot symbol, and joins forces with Optimus Prime to take down Shockwave, who cannot see the logic in the partnership and whose confusion is his own downfall.

The aftermath of *Dark Cybertron* is currently being explored in IDW series *More than Meets the Eye* and *Robots in Disguise*, and promises to tackle the ramifications of this landscape-changing event.

So there you have it, as if The Transformers haven't been at war long enough. Through all these different publishers and countless cancellations, the ardent fanbase has remained true and steady, which has been the driving force behind every single comeback issue. And whilst IDW Publishing have been enjoying great success both commercially and critically with their TF series as of late, you get the inclination that not even another cancellation would stop them. The Autobots and The Decepticons are locked in timeless combat that much is certain, it just remains to be seen which media platform will be their next battlefield.

'Til all are one!





# JURASSIC SPARK

LUDROS:  
VANESSA BERGEN





Every time a new *Transformers* film is set to hit theatres, there are a few things that start going through our heads. Most of them may or may not centre on Megan Fox's character Mikaela Banes. And some of them may or may not be about the realistic improbability of her relationship with Shia LeBeouf's Sam Witwicky. But once all of that is out of the way we think about toys. Because toys are awesome and toys in the '80s were even more awesome.

The *Transformers* toys of our youth weren't like the toys you find in stores today. Today's toys are made of flimsy, rubbery plastic that is easily melted by blowtorches, though we wouldn't know anything about that. But when we were kids it was a very real probability that at some point in our short lives we were going to get hit hard in the head by a die-cast Optimus Prime. In addition to our extensive Optimus Prime-as-weapon memories there is another memory a few of us here at STARBURST have. We have a confession to make... some of us... also remember going to our local shops on the weekends hoping in vain they had gotten more Grimlocks in stock. Yes... there are people here who identify as Dinobots fans.

That's right – there is a fraction of us in the world of *Transformers* fans who – gasp – don't hate the Dinobots with a passion. It's not something we always feel comfortable bringing up. It's not a fact we feel we could just toss out in the middle of a random group, admissions like that are generally met with blank stares and questions about our level of sanity. So our love usually remains hidden, forced to retreat against the wave of naysayers who believe the prehistoric-inspired group effectively ruined the beloved animated series.

The Dinobots were the first sub-group introduced in the cartoon series and first appeared on October 27th, 1984 in episode eight, aptly titled "S.O.S. Dinobots." Sensor readings reveal dinosaur bones while investigating seismic activity near the Ark and an inspired Wheeljack and Ratchet create Grimlock, Slag (or Slug as he's sometimes referred to) and Sludge. Snarl, Swoop, and the lesser-known Paddles would come later. (Paddles! We miss you!) Unfortunately, this first incarnation of the Dinobots are incapable of any cognitive reasoning and end up turning on the Autobots. Luckily, Wheeljack is able to stop them by using his Magnetic Inducer. Prime decides to deactivate the Dinobots and seal them away forever in a cavern.

At the same time, the Decepticons perform a surprise ambush on the Great Falls hydroelectric power facility. The humans try to get a message to the Autobots via Teletraan – but the Dinobots destroyed it during their rampage! Luckily, Hound's sensors discover the attack and he and Spike go out to investigate. They rally back to the Ark and Optimus comes to the rescue, leaving Bumblebee behind to guard the base. But when the Autobots arrive at Great Falls, Megatron is waiting for them. With the power of the facility behind him, Prime and the others are no match for Megatron's fusion cannon.

Facing death and destruction, Bumblebee disobeys Prime's orders and goes to the plant to investigate. He rescues Spike and returns to the Ark, informing Wheeljack and Ratchet of the situation. Wheeljack thinks on his feet and decides to install an update to the Dinobots before releasing them, which will trigger memory components in their brains. These new Dinobots are still far more simple-minded

than the Autobots, but are definitely smarter than their original incarnations. They arrive at the power facility just in time to save the day and a grateful Prime officially welcomes them into the Autobots fold. Their hijinks don't stop there, however, as they appear throughout the series and comics to occasionally challenge Prime's authority and wreak a little havoc before helping to save the day (sometimes begrudgingly).

So maybe the Dinobots aren't rocket scientists, but that doesn't mean they aren't without their strengths, the most obvious being, well.... strength! In most of the *Transformers*' universes and generations they can't combine to create a larger Dinobot (a fact that never ceased to aggravate our ten-year old, toy buying selves), but working together as a fighting-force they are virtually unstoppable against combiners. This brute strength against larger opponents is first displayed in season one's sixteenth episode, "Heavy Metal War" in which the Dinobots help Prime and the others successfully defeat the Constructions merged form, Devastator.

Showing up and displaying some brute force is what the Dinobots are good for. They are valuable tools in the Autobots' arsenal during situations that are too dangerous for the rest of the team. So why do we fans feel so guilty for our appreciation? Less intelligent characters need love too. Maybe the Dinobots are the Hodor of the *Transformers* world, but reading their history they are actually kind of cool if you think back on it. Okay maybe they aren't, don't concentrate on that last statement too hard. But they certainly aren't the most annoying group to come out of the cartoon – come on,





the Insecticons win that race by a mile.

What sets the Dinobots apart from their other sub-group counterparts and makes us love them even more is the fact that it's not always black and white for them. They waver between the good guys and bad guys because they know their own worth and are, just, smart enough to demand respect from those they aide. They are forever stuck between the two warring groups: too good for the Decepticons but too self-serving and arrogant for Optimus Prime to completely trust them and allow them to live among the other Autobots. And that's okay with us, because fighting on the side of good can get messy for anyone when egos come into play. Despite their forms, that's a very relatable, human trait to possess. Tickets to Dinobot Island, anyone?



## WHICH DINOBOT ARE YOU?

Everyone's got a primitive side – find out which Dinobot you would be!

• You have clearly got leadership skills and can't wait to sink your jaws into an opponent. Sometimes you wonder if you are just a bit too arrogant and worry if that trait could lead to your downfall. If this sounds like you, you are **GRIMLOCK** and you like to SMASH!

• You are often seen as the perfect second-in-command, a fact which infuriates you as you hate any and all forms of authority and aren't afraid to question anyone in power. Even though you are one of the toughest, best fighters around you occasionally find yourself going solo because you are just too badass to follow the crowd. If you are the "bad boy" of your group – you are **SLAG** (or **SLUG**, because Slag is too much of a bad boy name for some countries).

• You believe the strongest person should be in charge and what you lack in brains you more than make up for in brawn. Your friends may call you the "dumb one" of the group but no one can deny your brute strength. If this sounds like you and you can actually read this, you are **SLUDGE**!

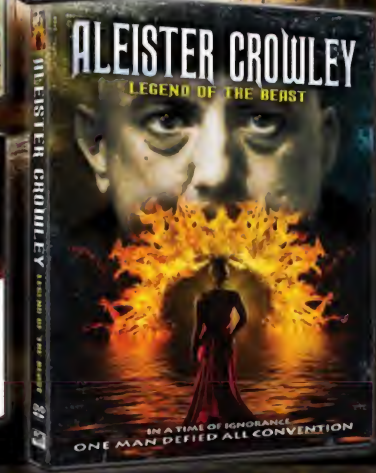
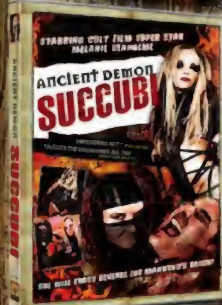
• If you have friends, they call you the loner of the group. You are so depressed and unsociable it's a miracle you are invited to parties at all. If the only time you crack a smile is while you are busting heads and you think the only joys in life can be found during battle you are **SNARL** and we are afraid of you.

• So maybe you are just as defiant and egotistical as all of your friends, but you are still considered the easy-going, fun one. Unfortunately, most of the time it's only your friends who think so because you can look totally frightening and strangers are afraid to approach you. If you can switch it up and be the life of the party while also instilling the fear of death in your enemies you are **SWOOP**.

• You are a gentle giant, happy to help both humans and machines. You are willing to risk your freedom to save others, content to pass the time sleeping the hours away and dreaming of being reunited with your friends. If this describes you then you are the long-lost Dinobot, **PADDLES**, and you are deeply missed.



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THE APPEAL OF THE TRANSFORMERS MOVIES COME DOWN TO ONE SINGLE PREMISE: SEEING GIANT ROBOTS HITTING EACH OTHER IS FUN. THOSE OF US WHO GREW UP IN THE '80S ARE, HOWEVER, FAMILIAR WITH AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT SORT OF ROBOT WAR. NAMELY A BATTLE OF THE BRANDS. GOBOTS VERSUS TRANSFORMERS. BOTH BRANDS WERE INTERESTINGLY COMPLICATED MODEL VEHICLES THAT, WITH A FEW CLICKS AND TWISTS, TURNED INTO A KICK-ASS ROBOT FIGHTING MACHINE AND BOTH SETS OF TOYS HIT THE TOP OF MANY A BIRTHDAY AND CHRISTMAS WISH LIST AT THE TIME. THOUGH WE ALL KNOW WHO THE WINNER WAS, IT WAS ACTUALLY THE GOBOTS THAT STARTED OUT IN THE LEAD...

# THE REAL CHALLENGE OF THE GOBOTS

BY ED FORTUNE

Japanese toy manufacturer Bandai debuted their range of shape-shifting robots in 1982, a clear year before the first Transformers came out. The initial launch had the catchy title of 'Machine Robo'. The name got switched round to Robo Machine by the time it hit most European toy shelves, and would change yet again in 1984 to GoBots when toy truck maker, Tonka, bought the licence. This confused mess didn't help them sell, but the whole 'two toys in one' deal meant that they were very popular that Christmas. Even though this range of toys featured some fairly well-built models with charming touches (the Rolls Royce, for example, turned into a top-hat wearing robot), when the Transformers came out the following year, they out-sold their opposition quite solidly. The reason had nothing to do with quality or price and everything to do with storytelling and marketing.

Hasbro had learned an important lesson from one of their previous toy ranges,

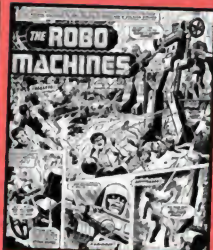
*G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*. In order to sell fancy toy soldiers to a generation of children who were born during the Cold War, Hasbro had to sell these toys as heroic or villainous characters rather than anything based in reality. Taking a leaf from Marvel's playbook, Hasbro borrowed the idea of S.H.I.E.L.D. versus Hydra and scaled their toys down to fit with the already popular (and heavily story-led) *Star Wars* toy range. Hasbro bombarded kids with *G.I. Joe* cartoons and comic books and the toys flew off the shelves as a result. They pulled exactly the same trick with Transformers, creating a whole range of media products, starting with full background stories on the back of the box of every single Transformer. Hasbro's media machine meant that half the time, the kids were literally handing over their pocket money for what amounted to an advert for their products.

Bandai hit back in the strangest and

least effective way imaginable. They wanted a way to push Robo Machines in the UK and turned to comics publisher Fleetway for ideas. The publisher sold them a slot in their iconic *Eagle* comic and you do have to wonder if Bandai had actually ever read anything Fleetway made. Regular *Eagle* comic strips included a genocidal alien called Doomlord and a mad computer that regularly abducted folk and made them live out nightmarish scenarios. The Robo Machines comic strip went along a similar vein: a renegade scientist invaded Earth with a collection of criminal robots and proceeded to destroy a small village in East Anglia, murdering people as they went. The planet Robotron sent some Security Force robots to stop them and what follows is a whistle-stop







tour of giant robot atrocities across the UK as both sides battle it out. The strip had some nice touches and was pretty dark in tone. This jarred against the charmingly dorky names of the actual toys. For example, the leader of the good guys was called Leader-1 and the evil robot boss who happened to be able to turn into a motorbike was called Cy-Kill.

When Tonka took over the licence, this version was slowly phased out, gathering more references to GoBots as it went. The strip ended in July 1985 on a fairly sombre tone – because *Eagle* didn't get a chance to properly finish the adventure, it concludes with the evil robots winning and though this was very much the sort of thing

British comics did back then, it perhaps didn't help sell many toys.

Tonka instead backed an all new cartoon show with an all new back-story. *The Challenge of the GoBots* was produced by Hanna-Barbera and again it pipped its rivals to the post, though this time only by a month. Sadly it lacked the sharp design and tone of the far superior *Transformers* cartoon. The only element it shared with the *Eagle* comic strip was that both stories featured a small boy who befriended the good guy GoBot Scooter, which is a pity as both characters happened to be quite irritating regardless of the story. Gone was the action-packed, well paced grittiness and instead we got a bland and generic cartoon with no real back-story and nothing to encourage young imaginations.

One of the more odd elements was that all the GoBots had the power to fire beams out of their hands and that they could fly. This made the GoBots who could turn into planes and helicopters seem pretty redundant. This makes more sense when you consider that *The Challenge of the GoBots* was intended for a slightly younger audience than the *Transformers* series; which actually meant many of the slightly older children simply dismissed it. The series did get its own movie, the box office flop *GoBots: Battle of the Rock Lords*, in which the GoBots teamed up with aliens that could turn into rocks. Yet again, it came out before a similar Hasbro offering and yet again it didn't help. Where *The Transformers: The Movie* is now considered a kitsch classic, *Battle of the Rock Lords* has



long since been forgotten. And quite rightly so.

The GoBots range contained some real gems, partially because they weren't afraid to go for some really wacky ideas. One of the toys was a Power Suit, essentially super armour for the GoBots (because giant robots need armour, apparently). Like many of the toys it was a weird mix of awesome and stupid. Another great example of this was the Command Centre. This weird, dog-like toy changed into an equally odd giant-head robot thing, and doubled as a fake pet for any child who had grown bored of their AT-AT. Another fun set was Monsterous. Composed of multiple monster-like GoBots, it combined to create a brightly coloured horror that happened to dwarf almost every other

robot toy out there. Special mention also needs to go to Zod. This strange snapping monster didn't transform, it was a novel twist on those yapping dog toys, but rather than looking cute and fluffy it was all angles and sharp pointy bits. Its inclusion in the range didn't make much sense but it made a great villain and appeared in a lot of the spin-off media.

The toys are all sadly out of production, and this has led to some being highly sought after. The holy grail for GoBot collectors is the GoBotron Fortress. This huge play set looked nicely sinister and also quite fun. Despite rumours of several sets being in the hands of private collectors, no one has (as yet) confirmed that the toy was actually released to the general public. Certainly nothing like it has turned up collector's fairs or eBay,

but if it ever does, expect the price to be out of this world.

The name and background for the GoBots fell into Hasbro's hands in 1991 when the firm bought out Tonka. The toys themselves were licenced from Bandai, so Hasbro can't re-release Leader-1, Cy-Kill or even Zod. It hasn't stopped them from releasing super-cute versions of classic Transformers with a pullback motor called Go-Bots; or adding insult to injury by having Megatron beat up both Leader1 and Cy-Kill in the IDW comic book series. Time will tell if the GoBots will ever have their revenge, but if they ever appear on the silver screen again, then we can safely confirm that Hollywood has officially ran out of ideas.

# AND THE RUNNERS-UP ARE...

THE GOBOTS WEREN'T THE ONLY TOYS TO MISS THE MARK AND FAIL TO ACHIEVE SUPER-STARDOM. HERE'S A QUICK (AND BY NO MEANS CONCLUSIVE) LIST OF THE ALSO-RANS:



## ROCK LORDS

The appeal of both GoBots and Transformers was that they were two cool toys in one. Robots are cool, as are vehicles. Rock Lords took this idea to another level; a lower level as it turned out. Rock Lords were big hulking monsters that transformed into rocks. Given that the Rock Lords were made out of plastic, they didn't turn into terribly convincing rocks. The best thing to do with a Rock Lord was to transform it into its exciting plastic rock form and then throw it at a classmate or sibling. A rubbish toy perhaps, but quite a good addition to the playground arsenal. Technically, the Rock Lords are part of the world of the GoBots, which means that they're also now part of the Transformer's universe. We don't expect to see them appear in a Hollywood blockbuster any time soon though.



## BATTLE BEASTS

Perhaps one of the oddest spin-offs were the Battle Beasts. Much like the early Transformer toys, each beast sported a heat sensitive badge. Rubbing the badge revealed an elemental symbol which was meant to represent the beast's special power, though if the beast was, say an eagle, its power was probably going to be air. These small, anthropomorphised animal action figures were originally meant to tie-in with the Transformers and in Japan they were called Beastformers. Their origin story is rather fun, originally the Battle Beasts were lovely fluffy creatures who looked a bit like popular toyline Sylvanian Families, but thanks to an invasion by Decepticons they became kick-ass animal warriors. These proto-Pokémon dropped their giant robot connection before reaching the rest of the world, for which we can only be grateful.



## VOLTRON

Voltron was primarily a cartoon that came with a toy range, rather than the other way round. The show was about a series of vehicles that combined to form a giant battle robot, and they were similarly fun. The core set combined robot lions into one super robot but they were versions that used air, sea and land vehicles as well. Voltron was a weird toy, but it did have cars that transformed into fists. This Bandai toy range also inspired a wide variety of robot toys that combined to make a bigger robot.



## PARASITES

Possibly the worst transforming toy out there, with the exception of the Rock Lords. Matchbox's attempt to corner the market involved mantis-like creatures that folded flat and 'hid' inside toy cars that could be split in two. On the plus side, you meant your effectively had two toys; a car and weird plastic monster thing. The down side was that both toys were a bit crap. They had a vaguely cool backstory involving Halley's Comet, but it wasn't that well developed and these toys soon ended up in the bargain basement bin.



## LINKITS

Matchbox's other entry into the weird robot toy market was Linkits. This was a construction toy that featured click-together connectors. The idea is that you slugged these things together and added accessories to create all sorts of strange and semi-robotic alien beings. Matchbox really went all out with these guys - they produced an audio adventure and commissioned a (surprisingly cutesy) comic strip in Fleetway's *Eagle* comic. The range flopped anyway, as they were essentially really strangely shaped LEGO.

## ZOIDS

Zoids came out roughly at the same time as GoBots and Transformers, proving that the eighties were a great time for fans of robot monsters. These cool click together robot dinosaurs didn't have much of a back-story at the start. In the UK however, the Spider-Man comic needed both a back-up strip and sponsor and so *Spider-Man and Zoids* was born. The Zoids enjoyed their own war story, featuring the cold-blooded Blue Zoids fighting the hot Red Zoids. The strip was written by Grant Morrison and featured the sort of surreal ideas and strange foreshadowing that would make him the comic book superstar he is today. The toys themselves were mostly pocket money fun, easy to assemble and powered by simple clockwork motors. The bigger sets included a mechanical T-Rex called Zoidzilla and huge King Kong-like super robot called the Mighty Gore. The sets are still around, though the back-story is now totally different to Morrison's original weirdness.





# OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS  
FROM THE WORLDS  
OF DOCTOR WHO  
WITH PAUL MOUNT



## DOCTOR WHO Wins at BAFTAs!

Last month in *Outside the Box* we reported that *Doctor Who* had received a handful of nods in the BAFTA Craft Awards, celebrating the work of TV's behind-the-scenes professionals. In the event *Doctor Who* picked up two awards at the presentation event held at The Brewery in London on 27th April. Last November's fiftieth anniversary episode *Day of the Doctor* (which starred Matt Smith, David Tennant and John Hurt) picked up the award for 'Special Visual and Graphic Effects' for the work of Milk VFX, Real FX and The Model Unit. Meanwhile Mark Gatiss' origins of *Doctor Who* drama *An Adventure in Space and Time* won the award for 'Make Up and Hair Design' thanks to the efforts of Vickie Lang.

*Doctor Who* remains in the running in the more populist TV BAFTAs with *An Adventure in Space and Time* nominated in the 'Best Single Drama' category and *Day of the Doctor* in the running for the public-voted Radio Times Audience Award. *Outside the Box* will again report on the results next month.

## Series 8

With the new season of *Doctor Who* expected to air in late August, news is coming in of new faces both in front of and behind the cameras as production continues on Peter Capaldi's first batch of episodes. Comedian/actor Ben Miller was recently confirmed as guest starring in Mark Gatiss' *Robots of Sherwood* episode alongside previously announced *Da Vinci's Demons* star Tom Riley (see last issue). Miller, who recently vacated, is starring in popular BBC detective

drama *Death in Paradise* and who is probably best-known to genre fans from his role as uptight Home Office minister James Lester in ITV's *Primeval*, will play a villain (a prime evil?) and said of his new role: "As a committed Whovian I cannot believe my luck in joining the Twelfth Doctor for one of his inaugural adventures... my only worry is that they'll make me leave the set when I'm not filming." Showrunner Steven Moffat said: "With Capaldi in the TARDIS, we knew we needed somebody special to send everybody behind the sofa. And quite

frankly, it's about time Ben Miller was in *Doctor Who*!"

Two writers new to the series have also recently been announced as joining the season eight team which includes Moffat, Mark Gatiss, Steve Thompson, Phil Ford and Gareth Roberts. Peter Harness, whose previous credits include *Wallander*, *Case Histories*, BBC4's acclaimed Frankie Howard drama *Rather You Than Me* and the forthcoming ambitious BBC drama based on Susanna Clarke's doorstep fantasy novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* has penned an episode rumoured to be entitled *Kill the Moon* and Jamie Mathieson (Frequently Asked Questions About Time Travel, *Dirk Gently, Being Human*) has contributed a script currently believed to be labouring under the title *Mummy on the Orient Express*. Both men are long-time fans of *Doctor Who* with Mathieson commenting recently on his work for *Who*: "I am writing for the British institution, children's nightmare factory and infinite narrative sand-pit that is *Doctor Who*. Which is an honour. And a joy. And a huge pressure. And very, very cool. And a chance to shine in front of the biggest audience I have ever had. (Or fall flat on my face, but let's not dwell on that)". Mathieson has also written the upcoming E4 parallel-universe drama pilot *Alt* which stars Gethin Anthony, Roxanne McKee and Craig Roberts.

Elsewhere, previously-announced new series guest stars have been commenting on their experiences working on the series in general and new Doctor Peter Capaldi in particular. Tom Riley (see above) told Flicks and the City: "I think Peter's going to completely revitalise the show - not that it needed revitalising. He's going to bring something completely different to the Doctor. When you change a lead actor, everything's going to change - but you can rest assured he's going to absolutely smash it." Keeley Hawes (see last issue) recently spoke of her time filming the fifth episode of the new series as "villainous banker" Ms Delphox: "I had such a lovely time on *Doctor Who*. Can't really call it work, it was absolutely lovely. My favourite part was something I thought I'd never get to do: when the camera shakes. You know, that kind of cheap effect! With the new Doctor - with Peter Capaldi - who is brilliant, and the lovely Jenna Coleman. They were so welcoming. It's quite nerve-wracking going on to a big show like that. They were absolutely delightful."

## DOCTOR WHO and the Hugo's

As well as its already-announced BAFTA Craft successes and nominations in the TV BAFTAs, it appears that **Doctor Who** is also dominating the 'Best Dramatic presentation, Short Form' (i.e. not feature films) category in the prestigious 2014 Hugo Awards which celebrates achievement specifically in the fields of science-fiction and fantasy. **Doctor Who** and related productions account for four of the six nominations in the category, including Steven Moffat's season seven finale *The Name of the Doctor*, the anniversary special *Day of the Doctor*, Gatiss' *Adventure in Space and Time* drama and the online-only spoof *The Five(ish) Doctors Reboot*, written and directed by Fifth Doctor Peter Davison which sees him unite with fellow late-period Time Lords Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy in increasingly desperate attempts to secrete themselves into the anniversary episode. Also nominated in the Short Form category are an episode of sci-fi drama *Orphan Black* and an episode of popular fantasy saga *Game of Thrones*. **Doctor Who** is no stranger to success at the Hugo's, with Neil Gaiman winning for 2012's *The Doctor's Wife*, Russell T. Davies and Phil Ford triumphing for *Waters of Mars* (2010) and Steven Moffat winning on four occasions with *The Empty Child/The Doctor Dances* (2005), *Girl in the Fireplace* (2006), *Blink* (2007) and *The Pandorica Opens/The Big Bang* (2011). The 2014 awards will be presented on 17th August during London 3, the 72nd World Science Fiction Convention, which is held at ExCel in London between 14th and 18th August. *Outside the Box* will report on **Doctor Who**'s success, or otherwise, in a future column.



## Book News

Time to clear some space on the bookshelves as a slew of tasty new **Doctor Who** titles are on their way. Just released is Gareth Roberts' highly anticipated novelisation of the late Douglas Adams' classic 1979 four-part serial *City of Death*, which starred Tom Baker and aired in the show's seventeenth season. Roberts, a familiar name on the credits of the current TV show, also adapted Adams' unfinished season seventeen story *Shada* which was published in March 2012. Fans hankering after further exploits of John Hurt's previously unsuspected War Doctor from the anniversary special can look forward to the 31st July release of a new hardback novel entitled *Engines of War*, written by George Mann, the popular steampunk author and creator of quirky Victorian detectives Newbury and Hobbes. The story is expected to fill in the gaps in the War Doctor's story and the events leading up to his appearance in the anniversary special episode. "It's a war story, at its heart, set against the backdrop of great turmoil and chaos," Mann recently told *Doctor Who Magazine*. "But it's also about the Doctor's personal journey, how he ends up where he is at the beginning of *The Day of the Doctor*. He's been through the wringer; and in *Engines of War*, he's not given any reprieve."

This summer will see the publication, by Wonderful Books, of Paul Smith's *The Classic Doctor Who Compendium*, a timely release as the classic series DVD range comes to an end with every episode currently in the BBC Archives bar one available for purchase. *The Compendium* will guide newcomers and dedicated fans alike through the maze of **Doctor Who** DVDs and their myriad exhaustive special features which chronicle virtually every aspect of **Doctor Who**'s production from 1963 to 1989. From the publisher's press release: "Every disc, every episode, every extra is collated, chronicled and cross-referenced in this complete guide to classic **Doctor Who** on DVD, with spoiler-free story outlines so no surprises are ruined for those still discovering the original series, suggestions for similar tales to those you already know you like, information on the extensive restoration work that has made the episodes look better than they ever have, and details of the wealth of special features on every disc that expand your knowledge of the worlds of **Doctor Who** - all fully indexed for easy reference. If you're only just learning about the long story of **Doctor Who** then *The Classic Doctor Who DVD Compendium* will guide you through the adventure ahead. If you're still building your collection it will help you discover further stories you're sure to enjoy, and if you already have every release, this book will be your ultimate companion to the complete range."

*Outside the Box* is perhaps most excited at the prospect of *Countdown to TV Action* by comics historian Steve Bishop which promises to explore the history of the classic *Countdown/TV Action* British weekly comics of the 1970s whose **Doctor Who** strips, featuring art by the likes of Gerry Haylock, John M Burns and Harry Nieldfield are often considered to be the finest examples of **Doctor Who** in the comic strip medium. The volume will be published by Bear Alley Books later in the year.



# WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK  
AT THE WHONIVERSE  
BY JR SOUTHALL



**W**e've all been there. It's 23 minutes into the episode. The Doctor and his companion have arrived, they've investigated. We know that *something bad* is out there, we've heard all about it. But we haven't seen it yet, and we know we're just about to. In maybe thirty seconds' time.

And then something unutterably crap wanders onto the screen.

We've been there so many times before. It's the moment when you're anticipating magic, and what you get instead is the Mandrels, or the Monoids... or in the case of *Genesis of the Daleks*, a crap mollusc. *Doctor Who* might be celebrated for the quality of its monster designs, but they can't all be Cybermen and Zygons – and sometimes the 'Monster Of The Week' is just a 'Monster That's Weak'.

Of course, *Doctor Who* wasn't about the creatures back in the beginning, but it was only a few episodes old – during the very second story in fact – when everything changed. The series we know gradually sprang from Terry Nation's post-nuclear

epic. During William Hartnell's three years in the role, and after that first Dalek story, the aliens began to have more and more of an impact on the show. The early attempts at creating something new and vivid were rather humble (the Voord and the Sensorites), but gradually the people working on *Doctor Who* became more inventive and more adept. 1965's *The Web Planet* might not be the most successful realisation of an alien world and its inhabitants, but it did signal something of a sea-change for the series, with very few of the "futuristic" stories that were written thereafter daring not to include a new monster of one kind or another. But for every Ice Warrior there was a Kroton, and for every Krynoid a Taran Wood Beast.

Why is that? After all, nobody ever sits down and thinks to themselves, 'Let's make something rubbish this time.' They're all professional designers, and every single one of them must have hoped they were about to create the new Dalek before starting work.

There are four stages involved in the

creation of a *Doctor Who* monster, and each one of these allows for the possibility that something might go wrong. First of all, there's the concept. Terry Nation might now be regarded as having struck lucky when Raymond Cusick turned his concept for the Daleks into an unforgettable design, but without that initial idea, Cusick would have had nothing to work with; these days we tend to think of Nation's instructions as being no more than that the creatures should "glide like the Georgian State Dancers," but in fact it's the notion of a species mutated by radiation poisoning and forced to inhabit armoured tank-like vehicles that enabled Cusick to visualise what the Daleks might actually look like. And that's the second stage, the design; taking the concept and turning it into something visually arresting – and more importantly, into something that the BBC can afford to put on screen – because the third stage, the physical realisation, is where things generally go wrong. Even with Nation's idea and Cusick's design being as wonderful as



they are, had the physical creation of the Dalek units ended up looking as unwieldy as the Quarks or as cheap as the Monoids, the design wouldn't have become the classic it is now regarded as. And finally, once you've got everything else right, it is still vital that the performance matches everything you have achieved so far. Even the Daleks would have been laughable if the operators hadn't done such a smooth job, and the voice artists hadn't perfected that rasping, grating tone.

There are many examples down the years of the series managing to get two or three of these elements absolutely correct, but falling down at one of the other hurdles – even in popular stories or during particularly imaginative and accomplished eras of the show. The *Wirm* in *The Ark in Space*, for example (a story almost universally regarded as a classic) look beautiful in photographs, and the concept behind their participation in the story is perfect, yet on screen they're a bit of a dud. Somewhere between conception and performance there's a flaw that makes them bland and clumsy in front of the cameras.

Mr Sin in *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, on the other hand, is flawless in every department (let's just forget the rat). Sadly, by the 1980s the series was running low on inspiration; in *Attack of the Cybermen*, for example, the Cryons are a weak concept that haven't been served particularly well by a rather odd, and not especially practical design. Even though the actors do them as much justice as they can given the ungainliness of the costumes, the end result is a creature that's unforgettable for all the wrong reasons.

Nobody especially minds the Cryons in the way that the Mandrels immediately spring to mind when thinking of "bad" Doctor Who monsters though, and there's a reason for that. Sometimes the concept is strong but the presentation is what disappoints. By 1979, *Doctor Who* was widely thought of as the Monster Show, and because for the previous couple of years monsters hadn't featured very frequently, when Graham Williams decided to make Season 17 something of a "monster season", the execution had to be perfect.



Yet it seems it was the monster makers who had forgotten how to do their thing. *Nightmare of Eden* is actually a rather challenging conceptual story, and the idea behind the Mandrels is a strong one: primitive beasts that can rampage across the spaceship with a more intellectual plot taking place simultaneously, and yet who it turns out are inextricably linked between both plots. The realisation of the costumes and performance of the actors within them are as good as could have been expected at the time; it is simply the design that leaves rather more to be desired. The flared legs, the top-heavy body, the dull green eyes; none of it quite works. The Mandrels probably looked great on paper, but under the harsh glare of the studio lights they come across as men in cheap fancy dress doing bad gorilla impersonations. Arriving on the back of the equally disappointing *Creature from the Pit* just compounded the disappointment.

In the modern series, far more care and attention is paid to the creatures and their

design, with Russell T. Davies having been particularly afraid when bringing Doctor Who back, that audiences would find the monsters laughable (which is ironic given that the first series' flagship monster was the Slitheen). This can't always result in classics like the Daleks and Cybermen (that kind of success isn't likely to happen as often as everyone would like), but sometimes even a fairly innocuous idea can reap big rewards.

Take the Weeping Angels. The concept is rather abstract: statue-creatures that are frozen when being looked upon and that feed off the energy of the life you would have lived if you weren't living that life somewhere else (or something). A version of Grandma's Footsteps brought to life in *Doctor Who* does indeed sound rather daft, and had the design been rather less literal (more along the lines of a man in a silver-painted leotard, the Raston Warrior Robot, for instance), and the performances not been enhanced by computers (wobbly "still" acting could have made the creatures hilariously), the Angels would have been considerably less successful. As it happened, a fairly loose concept and a ridiculously literal design led to perhaps the most memorable monster the new series has yet presented. Which just goes to show that the magic can happen even when you're not planning for it.

Of course, just as when the Mechnoids, Krotons and Quarks back in the 1960s tried to bottle the same lightning that had conceived of the Daleks and failed, so it is that if the new series keeps coming up with abstract but literal designs like the Silence and the Whispermen, diminishing returns will eventually set in.

All of which goes to show that a weak concept can lead to a memorable monster, just as a wonderful concept can lead to something mediocre. It's not easy getting the Doctor Who monsters right, and we should be grateful they manage it as often as they do.





## INTERVIEW - TERRY MOLLOY

*Terry Molloy is a well-seasoned film, radio, stage and television actor. He has been in over five-hundred radio plays, including playing Mike Tucker in THE ARCHERS for over forty years. But, STARBURST readers will know him best of all as Davros, the creator of the Daleks, from 1983 to 1989 and continuing through to the present day with the BIG FINISH audio adventures. STARBURST caught up with him to talk The Doctor, Davros and the importance of fans...*

**STARBURST:** What is it like being part of the legacy of one of the world's most iconic villains? [At this point Terry Molloy speaks with the voice of Davros. This is perhaps one of the most spine-tingling experiences this interviewer has ever experienced with a Doctor Who actor.] **TERRY MOLLOY:** I suppose there's only one word for it. And that's 'Excellent'. [Terry now returns to using his normal voice.] It's amazing. It was a job that I was asked to do in 1983, which was only going to be two weeks work. I was delighted to have worked on the show, but it didn't have anywhere near the same level of perceived kudos that it has now. Plus, I thought that would be it after *Resurrection of the Daleks*. How wrong I was! Here we are umpteen years later and it's still very much part of my life. And bless it!

What's it like to have been involved in two of the most iconic programmes in the last century, *Doctor Who* and *The Archers*? Eh, less of the last century! But yes, they have become iconic. As for my career

choices... well, there's no planning involved believe me. It's just the way the cards have fallen for me.

**Did you ever expect Doctor Who to have this longevity?**

It's always had a quirkiness, which meant it could have run, and run, and run, but then when it was finally 'exterminated', I thought, well that's probably it. But it gained a new life with the Big Finish audio adventures and I believed that was going to be as far as it could go. Then, I was absolutely gobsmacked when it did come back on the telly. Delighted too. Especially as a new generation of fans would now have a Doctor to hide behind the sofa with again. It's become very much a British institution and it may one day finally come to an end, but I don't think it'll ever stop being iconic.

**Do you think this is the last we've seen of Davros?**

There's no reason why that should be the case. People always say, 'you can't

do this and you can't do that, because of the timeline'. I say timeline-schimeline! You can jump anywhere on the timeline. There's no reason why you can't go back to Davros as a young man.

I think it would be great if he did come back. I think it would be even better if it were me in some incarnation! But then that's not my decision... that's in the lap of the gods.

**What has it been like working with so many regenerations of the Doctor over the years? I've loved working with them all. Colin and I always had a great rapport and continue to get on very well personally, Peter and I have worked together since, the same is true of Paul McCann at Big Finish, and Sylvester McCoy and I have worked many times together in the theatre. But they're all different actors and they've all played different aspects of the Doctor. Davros' nemesis is the Doctor, as the Doctor, as the Doctor. He might appear differently with each regeneration, but it's always the Doctor. So, as far as Davros is concerned, they're all the same being.**

The interesting thing about Davros and the Doctor is their relationship. It's not about the explosions around them, but the intellectual mind-game of chess they play with each other. They are both equal in intellectual stature – and they both know it! They're probably the only beings that are of the same intellectual level – it's just that they sit on different sides of the fence. They also know they're both ultimately alone. That's what's fascinating for me. The loneliness of the creator who is rejected; the loneliness of the Timelord who is rejected. What they're concerned about is who is going to win. That is one of the keys to Davros and the Doctor.

**What's it like to connect with the fans? [At this point a Dalek trundles by. Stops and looks at Terry. Then continues on its merry way.]**

I love interacting with the fans, because they are the ones who have really kept the show alive over the years. It's like being part of a big extended family. We may have been on different sides of the screen, but we have a commonality with each other, a shared experience for a programme that we all love. They're the ones who kept *Doctor Who* alive during the dead days when it was off TV and they're the ones who will continue to do so long into the future.

ANDREW KEATES





## INTERVIEW - NICHOLAS BRIGGS

*Nicholas Briggs may be best known as the voice of the Daleks, Cybermen and a variety of other roles. However, he's a fan at both-hearts and helped keep DOCTOR WHO alive before it returned to our screens. He's made several cameo appearances before and after the series return and is executive producer of the BIG FINISH audio adventures. STARBURST caught up with him to find out about his past, present and future...*

**STARBURST:** When did you first discover Doctor Who?

Nicholas Briggs: I don't remember a time when I didn't know about Doctor Who. I was born in 1961, so clearly there was a time when I didn't know about it, but you tend not to remember much when you're under three! So it feels like it's always been there – even when they took it off the air for all those years.

**Have you always been a fan?**

Yes, I've always been a fan of Doctor Who. From time to time I bump into people I haven't seen for years and one of the first things they mention is my fanaticism for Doctor Who. I've always loved it. I had a few, illicit flirtations with the works of Gerry Anderson, Irwin Allen and Gene Roddenberry... but I'm essentially a Doctor Who fan first.

**What's your favourite episode and why?**

I don't really do favourites. I think it diminishes the relative value of things and doesn't account for the fact that we like different things at different times of our life because of how we're feeling at any precise moment. But I can give you some of my top episodes, as it were. I mean, I'd love to see *Evil of the Daleks* again. I remember it very well. I remember seeing it twice. My God, I'd almost kill to see that one again! Also *Power of the Daleks*. I'm very much a Doctor Who and the Silurians kind of a guy. I love that story. *Death to the Daleks*... I love it. *Ark in Space* – superb! I'll stop now. I could go on forever.

**Did you ever expect to be the voice of the**

**Daleks? How did that come about?**

I never planned or expected to be the voice of the Daleks. I just loved doing Dalek voices as a kid and always wanted to find out how it was done, technically. When I found out, I did it for some amateur Doctor Who audio plays I was involved in. That translated into doing them for Big Finish and that got me the job on the TV show, because Russell T. Davies used to buy Big Finish CDs and loved my Dalek voices.

**What is a typical day like for a Dalek?**

A typical day for me as executive producer of Big Finish is to be either directing, writing or composing while simultaneously working with the team to run the company. Meetings, phone calls, reading scripts, casting... all that stuff. As a Dalek on the TV show, it's the same experience any other cast member has. You're picked up from a hotel in Cardiff by car, usually at some ungodly hour in the morning, driven to the studios or the location unit base and after hanging around for ages, you rehearse a scene. Then they take ages to set it up. Then you shoot the scene; then you have to hang around for ages while they set another scene up. But it's just loads of fun being there. Lots of great people and lots of laughs. I particularly like working with my friends Barnaby Edwards and Nicholas Pegg, who are the two longest-serving Dalek operators. They're great company.

**What's been your proudest achievement working in the Whoniverse?**

Proudest? I'm proud of the team I've

assembled for Big Finish. Finding people who really care and can really deliver is one of the hardest things in this business. There are so many people who want to work on this kind of thing, but just haven't got the ability. They're kind of in love with the idea of being on the inside, of being important, but that's all they've got. No actual ability to do anything useful except pose around, trying to be important. I'm sorry to say that those sort of people are everywhere. So, it's quite difficult to avoid them, because part of their talent is that they seem so plausible. So I'm really pleased we've got, for example, line producer David Richardson, producers' assistant Paul Spragg and our superb marketing guru Kris Griffin. But aside from all that, of course, I'm really proud to be the voice of the Daleks. It's so great to be associated with such a brilliant TV programme that I've loved all my life.

**We spotted you in *An Adventure in Time and Space* playing one of the original voiceover artists. Do you ever wish to be seen on screen?**

Of course, I'm an actor as well as all the other things I do. I was trained as an actor and I guess, if the chips are down, that's what I most want to do – if I absolutely had to choose... which thankfully I don't, because I love doing it all. But yes, I'd love to do more stuff on screen. It was great to do *Torchwood* and *Lewis* and I've done a couple of movies too. I'd love to do more. Any casting directors reading this?

**You are the Executive Producer of Big Finish, how did you become involved?**

Gary Russell, the first Big Finish producer, and I worked together on the amateur Doctor Who audios back in the day. We'd always said we'd like to do it 'properly' and one day, thanks to Gary, we did. He got Jason Haigh-Ellery on board with his company, Big Finish, they went to BBC Worldwide... and the rest is history. Gary got me involved right from the start. I'd already directed and done sound design and music for the Bernice Summerfield range – which was the way we moved to the BBC we could do this – so I was commissioned as writer/director/sound designer/composer for the first Doctor Who we did, *Sirens of Time*. And I spent years doing more and more of that until I became executive producer when Gary left to work for BBC Wales.

**What have you got coming up in the future?**

I'm currently working on a number of scripts for Tom Baker's Doctor, Colin Baker's Doctor and Sylvester McCoy's Doctor. I'm also doing the music for the next series of *Counter Measures* and the first series of *Survivors*. I'm keeping an eye on Jamie Anderson as he produces *Terrahawks* for us, and I'll be returning as Sherlock Holmes, recording in the summer, for *The Judgement of Sherlock Holmes*, a box set coming out at the end of the year, by the brilliant Jonathan Barnes. Loads of stuff. It's never-ending, and that's the way I like it. Cue music!

ANDREW KEATES

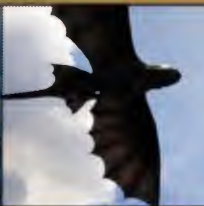


# DOUBLE DRAGON

BY ADAM STARKEY

It's been four years since we first met Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third and the adorable Toothless, but this summer will see the duo and their friends finally return to our cinema screens! STARBURST looks ahead to what fans can expect from the eagerly awaited **HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2...**

**H**ow to Train Your Dragon was a remarkable moment for DreamWorks Animation. A film about a young Viking's fight for acceptance atop a lethal dragon, it carried enough wonder, emotional heft and stunning visuals to match the finest offerings from their Pixar rivals. While it was unfortunately released within a few months of the emotional whirlwind of Toy Story 3, Hiccup & Toothless still managed to garner critical and commercial success. Now with the spark of Pixar not shining quite as brightly, the path is clear for the upcoming



DreamWorks sequel to have its well-deserved time in the spotlight.

The world of Berk began in the mind of British author Cressida Cowell, where it was developed into a series of eleven books with the first, *How To Train Your Dragon*, being published in 2003. The novels are witty, quirky and just as loveable as the feature film, but many characters and plot details were changed in the translation to the big screen. Toothless wasn't a feared Night Fury dragon, the Vikings weren't wrapped up in a heated war with the beasts and Hiccup's love interest Astrid didn't even exist. Despite these changes, author Cowell has expressed in her blog how pleased she was with the end product. "The film keeps true to the spirit and message of the book, the relationship between Stoick and Hiccup, and the characters and the world I created."

Since the original film's success, a variety of spin-offs across many other mediums inevitably spawned. Skipping across the unsurprisingly average video game tie-in, a TV series was also commissioned by Cartoon Network, set between the first and second films. Titled *Dragons: Riders of Berk and Defenders of Berk* for the second season, it featured most of the original voice casting (aside from notable exceptions like Gerard Butler and Jonah Hill) and followed the exploits of the village as they trained dragons and attempted to maintain the balance between man and beast after the events at the end of the first film.

Now flash forward a couple of years and the second installment is mere months away, bearing the pressure of being one of the most anticipated films of the summer. But after the original welcomed the presence of dragons onto the Viking island of Berk and left Hiccup with a prosthetic leg, where is DreamWorks planning to take the franchise?

*How to Train Your Dragon 2* picks up five years after the events of the original. Hiccup is now 20 years old and will soon assume the coveted chieftainship of Berk title from his father, causing waves of self-doubt to rush over the Viking's shoulders once more. After the revelatory discoveries made in the first movie, the tribe has also developed a newfound curiosity into what lies beyond the borders of Berk, leaving Hiccup and Toothless to ride over seas to search for new

islands, all while the village sits back and enjoys the hazardous yet breathtaking sport of dragon racing.

Hiccup's exploration, however, soon yields trouble for the island. His and Toothless' curious eye stumble upon a much larger conflict that exists between dragons and humans, and the presence of notorious dragon-hater Drago Bludvist (Djimon Hounsou) and his band of trappers including Eret (Kit Harrington) complicates matters even further. Let's just say they don't appear to take too kindly to a harmonious society between man and his winged, fire-breathing companion.

Another potentially troubling new character is the mysterious dragon-whisperer-come-Hiccup's mother, Valka. Voiced by Cate Blanchett, the character was apparently abducted in a dragon attack many years prior to the first film, her intentions and role in the plot are still unknown. But her hostility to outside intruders decked out in tribal armour and living on an island populated by the beasts, could hide some dark secrets that lie between the two species. Valka's presence also raises some big questions, like did she ever try and reunite with her husband and son? And does this abandonment perhaps indicate a deeper reason for Hiccup's insecurities?

Even without these answers it's clear this sequel is hoping to expand the universe to spectacular new heights. Dean DeBlois, co-writer and co-director of the first movie, is now taking primary control of the project, and he's cited the Hayao Miyazaki masterpiece *My*





Neighbor *Totoro* and *Star Wars* classic *The Empire Strikes Back* as key inspirations in the filmmaking process. So expect a sequel that blows open the world, contains fountains of charm, provides greater depth to the characters and that aims to be ranked as one of the greatest films of all time. DeBlois certainly likes to pound on the pressure!

While it might be sensible to dial back those lofty expectations, we've been promised that the film's world will receive a massive expansion in every regard. The original introduced a handful of dragons like the Monstrous Nightmare which coats itself in a blanket of fire and the two-headed Belch & Barf, but a whole host of new dragons are ready to cause Hiccup havoc in the sequel. Cloudjumper, Valka's personal companion with his commanding presence that helps collect lost dragons, the Timberjack with its broad razor-sharp wings and Skrill, which can ride bolts of lightning and blast beams of electricity, are just a few of the dazzling creatures we can expect to see.



Hiccup has a few gadgets up his sleeve this time around too. Already revealed in preview footage is a flying suit which allows him to soar alongside Toothless, provided he is supported by shots of fire underneath his wings. He has also acquired a dragon blade fire-sword that can cast protective blazing circles, causing dragons to believe he's one of their kind. All this combined with his fancy new leather armour and helmet combination push the idea that this is a far cry from the Hiccup we met stumbling around with a puny dagger in the first film.

He isn't the only one undergoing drastic hormonal transformations either. Snotlout, Fishlegs and twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut have all been on the receiving end of a growth spurt, gaining their own specific dragon

partner from the first film in the process. The relationship between the feisty Astrid and Hiccup also appears to have blossomed over the past five years, possibly setting up some heartbreaking decisions for Hiccup down the inevitably gloomy line.

DreamWorks Animation have also pushed themselves technically with *How To Train Your Dragon 2*, representing the first film at their studios to utilise new generation software throughout the entirety of the production cycle. This technology has enabled the studio to achieve facial animations that go beyond anything we







have seen before, with vivid details on hair and expressions, breathing new life into all these characters for 2014. Improved lighting tools in this software should also allow for some stunning flying sequence vistas that even surpass those in the original, something we can't wait to see smash our sweet retinas in IMAX 3D.

As a planned trilogy, the events of this sequel will likely reveal some early plot indicators for the final installment that's set for release in 2016. DeBlois is already confirmed to be staying on board for the third film, and he's promised that the entire

trilogy will represent a 'coming of age' tale for Hiccup. A phrase so broad, he might as well have said to expect a sequence of moving pictures. But with *Star Wars* banging on the inspirational gong, might some mind-bending twist or cliffhanger ending be in store to fire up anticipation for final chapter? The books didn't shy away from killing-off beloved faces in the series, so what if the sequel is out to collect our tears through an unexpected and show-stopping death? *Toy Story 3*'s burning furnace scene could be just the beginning of the seat-clutching trauma to be found in western animation.

Author Cowell, who is working closely with the team, has also previously expressed arching plans for the trilogy at the Annecy film festival last year, stating that it will offer reasons for why dragons no longer exist. "There was a period of time when all the cultures in the world believed in dragons, so what did happen to them?" she teased. We can only imagine what that implies, and our heads aren't chiming with sunshine and lollipops.

But pushing speculation aside, *How To Train Your Dragon 2* has the potential to be another game changer for DreamWorks. Compared to other animated sequels released recently, this follow-up is taking some significant risks in character development and the creation of a wider universe to set-up a fitting finale for the series down the line. As one of the most anticipated films of the summer, perhaps it's time for the Marvel blockbuster domination to take a break in 2014. Hiccup, Toothless and his band of dragon-riding Vikings are back - older, wiser and leaner, and that summer release date simply cannot come soon enough!

*HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2* swoops into UK cinemas July 4th.



# THRILLSEEKER

Telling the tale of a depraved game where self-worth and financial reward collide, writer/director **E.L. Katz's** **CHEAP THRILLS** is set to horrify UK audiences this month. **STARBURST** caught up with the filmmaker to talk about his debut film, his inspirations, the state of the genre and more...

Words: Paul Risker



Pat Healy as Craig

**STARBURST:** Can you remember the moment you first discovered horror? E.L. Katz: Interestingly, I have two notable memories in my head. One was when I went to see a punk rock show - my first live concert. I was probably only thirteen at the time, and my dad took me and a friend. It was around Halloween, and behind the band was this awful vision of people ripping guts out, and doing all this crazy stuff. I thought, "What is this?!" It looked so visceral, and I had never seen that happen to people in a movie. It was *Dawn of the Dead*. The mix of the punk rock music and imagery was pretty stunning, and I thought to myself "I've got to find this movie!". So I was into George Romero early on, along with *Evil Dead 2*. It's crazy because there is no reference point. Now you've seen so many movies that it's hard to get excited. But it was just that mix of the black comedy, the energy and the terror, which I hadn't experienced before. Quickly, I tried to track down all of the Masters of Horror, but before that I read a lot of Stephen King and Clive Barker. My dad owned a used bookstore, and so I just devoured as much horror literature as I could, probably even before I knew about the films.

#### Which authors featured in this journey of discovery?

I started with Agatha Christie because my dad was like, "This isn't too bad". Then I moved onto Stephen King before I thought, alright, I have read almost every Stephen King and Clive Barker book. Then I branched out, and I began to figure out who were the original guys. I devoured every Lovecraft story that I could, probably even more than Poe, who I love. I loved the monsters that were implied and the body horror. There is just the weird insanity because of the crazy quality that there was to it. The writing was so mannered, and yet it built to such an explosion. I went insane with these characters. I loved the guys who were doing the bizarre fiction, and having that

sense of the surreal and the grounded at the same time was interesting. I just devoured as much of it as I could. Ramsey Campbell was important for me. I thought he was fascinating because of how he managed to trick you. He would describe the room, the lamps and this, and then the pale face that moves beneath the bed, and then this. He would just so casually insert an image. It was a very effective scare in a way that I hadn't seen before, and when I started writing scripts I tried to keep that in mind as to how I would lay out my scares. Not so much a jump scare, but just let something be casually wrong. Let the reader say, "Wait. This doesn't make sense".

#### Is this what audiences can expect from *Cheap Thrills*?

No, because it's essentially a black comedy made by a horror fan. I had the idea of, what if I essentially did a party film, but channel a Tobe Hooper or Euro horror sensibility. But it's still this funny, screwed-up situation with a very manic, primal undercurrent that builds and builds. I don't know if there are scares in it *per se*. There is definitely creepy behaviour and you might even get a bit of the Stephen King sense of humour; that's definitely in there. The villain is a goofy guy and he's funny, but you do, in some moments, think there is something really wrong, and that's where you'll see the horror atmosphere peeking its head out.

#### Horror can be disconcerting, and it can

almost be a subtle sense of anxiety... Films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave* have that sense of unease. It's essentially a drama, but one long piece. I wouldn't say that that is what *Cheap Thrills* is, because it gets so fucking crazy. But those are the films I am definitely a fan of.

#### Do you consider horror to be losing that subtle touch following a recent trend of



Cheap Thrills cast



Sara Paxton as Violet



Ethan Embry as Vince and David Koechner as Colin

filmmakers who seem intent on provoking a reaction of disgust from the audience? Well I definitely think I'm guilty of shock and disgust, and there are definitely a lot of people who rely too much upon CGI. I don't believe right now that the main culprit in horror for degrading the genre is gore. A lot of the horror films that are made by the studios are not R-rated, and people are relying too much on special effects. There is something alienating about a digitally created ghost or monster. The stories are also lacking, and it doesn't feel like a good, organic drama. You look at *The Shining* or *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Changeling* or later films such as *The Others* and *Guillermo del Toro's* films. They are very smart in establishing someone who you actually care about, and a world that seems real. A lot of times now it seems that everything is just to serve a scare, which we need every so many minutes. It has a very short attention span, especially for a sub-genre that is supernatural and should be patient in order to get a scare. A lot of young people who go out to see horror films, maybe they don't have an attention span. It is a very ADD culture, and with the internet and being able to watch things on your computer while you are texting and watching something else, then it is very easy for people to not even be absorbed by anything they are watching. So I do feel that it is nice when a horror film comes along and takes its time and lets you live in the space of the characters.



*Cheap Thrills* writer Trent Haaga with E.L. Katz





**"True horror is sometimes the discovery of something in yourself that is a lot uglier than maybe you ever imagined"**

Sometimes the scariest horror films are mysterious. You don't know what the tricks are going to be, and so you feel that they could be a lot worse than anything they show.

*Cheap Thrills* is your feature directorial debut, and you're directing a segment of *ABCs of Death 2*. It must be an exciting time for you.

It is, and it's funny because I started off doing horror journalism! I had no intention of being a filmmaker. I was going to go to school and study live sound production. I did journalism pretty much just to get the chance to watch films and write about them. So it's been a really wild turn, and you just don't expect this to happen. You just don't expect the chance to get a movie made, and you don't expect that it will do well. You can't even describe it because it's just a weird thing. You can't celebrate because you have an obligation to do good work, and not to just say, "I did it, I made it". I haven't arrived. I've done one movie! People need to do a whole lifetime of films to be great consistently. So there's pressure too.

What was the genesis of *Cheap Thrills*?

For me, what was interesting about the script was that you have essentially the evil rich couple, the dodgy guy, and then the everyman - this guy who is struggling to do the right thing. I feel that the audience, all of us, come close to being the tormentor, to becoming somebody that debases themselves. We can be both of these people, and it is very easy to say, "Okay these are the good guys and these are the bad guys". But by the end it completely blurs, and it's interesting to me that personally with morality, we always put a value on ourselves. We have our own narrative, but it can change, and we could be surprised by who we are. Now that's the thing that has always

scared me. This is a very Lovecraftian trope, but true horror is sometimes the discovery of something in yourself that is a lot uglier than maybe you ever imagined. Capitalism is sometimes a mechanism for drawing out really ugly shit in people, but we also live in a very voyeuristic culture now with reality television, gossip and the way we treat each other. It is easy for us, the good people, to be that sadistic eye that is watching other people self-destruct, just as easily as we can all too willingly jump into a position where you will humiliate yourself for any sort of recognition or money. So there are a lot of things about the movie that we were thinking about. When I first met with David Koehnner he told me, "I want to play the character like he's a corporation." That was great conceptually, but you've got to play him like he's a husband, and you need to have personal stakes. What are you willing to do to keep her happy? If you are just playing him as a concept it's going to overshadow it, and he will not be human. The most important thing for me is to never let the themes overpower the people, because then we can project whatever we want onto them. If you have too much of a thesis when you go in, it's just going to be that one thing. It has to live and breathe. In screenwriting you are told to have your theme, and to focus on it. I understand that, but sometimes it's fun to just let it breathe. If you care about anything it will be about something.

The artist doesn't need to be heavy handed. No, and I'm not smart enough to design that grand statement against capitalism! I'm thirty-two. I grew up in the suburbs. You can only bring so much, and you just hope that the other things are happening organically.

*CHEAP THRILLS* opens in UK cinemas June 6th, and is reviewed on page 75.



# HORROR

## Obscura

This month the Mancunian Martin Vretharth unearths a classic zombie movie in which the walking dead disturb the peace of rural Northern England...

# DON'T WAKE THE DEAD

**I**t's now regarded as one of the best modern zombie films, but when it was first released *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* (1974) was often dismissed as exploitation trash. Given a remit by the producers to emulate *Night of the Living Dead* 'but in colour', director Jorge Grau delivered a film which not only had shocks, gore and thrills, but a message which the Green Party would approve of.

It wasn't treated with much respect by the distributors, who retitled the film for their various markets. No less than fifteen titles exist. The original, *Non si deve profanare il sonno dei morti*, the literal translation of which (*Do Not Profane the Sleep of the Dead*) led to its more commonly used title in the US, *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie*. It also played the drive-in circuit with *The Last House*

on the Left as *Don't Open The Window* (the trailer tagline added the chilling phrase, "whatever's out there will wait"), and was re-released in Italy in the eighties as *Zombi 3*.

George (Ray Lovelock) is closing his antique shop and getting out of the smog-filled atmosphere of Manchester for the weekend. The horror to come later is foreshadowed as the camera looms close on a macabre painting in his shop; it's nondescript, but resembles a decaying face (an alternate print of the film actually superimposes the face of the lead zombie on the painting). He rides through the city centre on his motorbike, scarf pulled up across his nose and mouth, covering his impressive beard, protecting himself from the fumes and pollution which is all around him. It's billowing from cars,

chimneys, air conditioning units; the air is thick with a harmful haze. Dead birds and rubbish fill the waste grounds. Although this city was once at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, by the early seventies things were much different. As technology improved, the pollutants in the air were less from factories and more from an increase of power stations and cars. The commuters wait for their buses and drivers sit at the wheels of their cars, their eyes glazed over; they are practically zombieified already. Not even a young woman running naked from the steps of Manchester Cathedral and straight across the road can give these docile, regular Joe's run-of-the-mill lives any excitement ('streaking' was a quite popular form of rebellion and expression back then). As soon as George reaches the countryside, he lowers his scarf to fill his lungs with some fresh English air. His break doesn't go well, however, as when he stops at a petrol station a young woman in a Mini (car and skirt) reverses over his bike. With the garage unable to repair the damage until after the weekend (and he's quite surly as he tells the mechanic, "not to bugger me about") he insists on making the woman, Edna (Cristina Galbó) give him a lift; only he takes the driving seat, "we don't want to go the whole way in reverse, do we?" With his obviously bad people skills already displayed, he attempts to put Edna at ease, "You don't have to worry, I'm not going to jump you or something".

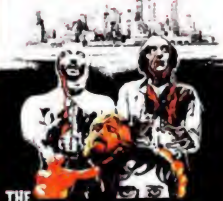
The pair have very different places to go: George needing to meet up with some friends at his getaway cottage in Windermere, and Edna en route to visit her sister, who is about to be admitted to hospital as an intervention for her drug problems. He agrees to take her there first, when she promises to let him use her car for the weekend. On the road, there's an ominous incidence when George aggressively overtakes a truck, which happens to belong to the Manchester morgue. Unfortunately, Edna can't remember exactly how to get to her sister's house in South Gate, so George goes to ask for directions from some local farmers who are working in a nearby field. They are trialing a new machine from the Department of Agriculture (Experimental Section) which emits ultra-sonic radiation, killing all the parasites and insects that hamper the farmer's crops. Back at the car, Edna is waiting nervously for George when she hears some splashing in the river. She turns to see a lumbering, drenched man coming from a small graveyard. He makes a grab at her, but she manages to get across the river just as George and the farmer are coming down the lane. The figure has gone, and George is skeptical. The farmer jokes it must have been Guthrie 'the loony', a tramp who used to doss down by the banks of the river, up until a week earlier when he drowned. It's a clear riff on the opening attack in

Romero's classic, but works to establish an unearthly aura.

Meanwhile, at Edna's sister's house, things are not going well. Not only has Katie (Jeannie Mestre) figured out that her husband, Martin (José Lfante) and sister are planning to send her away to get clean, but she is rudely interrupted while shooting up when Guthrie (Fernando Hilbeck) invades the solitude of her shed. She manages to make a run for it, coming across Martin who is indulging his photographic hobby in the garden. Guthrie throttles him as Katie looks on horrified, the camera flash illuminating the slaughter like a strobe.

Edna and George get there just as Katie is attempting to run away down the lane but by the time they get back to Martin, he is dead and Guthrie has gone. Examining Martin's body, the police find every bone in his torso has been smashed. A cranky, older police sergeant - billed only as 'The Inspector' (Arthur Kennedy) - is suspicious of everyone and loses no time by rubbing them all up the wrong way. Especially as he makes George and Edna stay in the local hotel so they are available to be interviewed again. Katie is the Inspector's prime suspect, assuming she has blacked out following a heroin fix. He's an old-school Irish copper, opinionated, gruff, and bigoted. He's also not averse to getting rough with George, to whom he has taken

LET SLEEPING CORPSES LIE



THE  
**LIVING DEAD**  
AT THE MANCHESTER MORGUE

NON SI DEVE PROFANARE IL SANO DEI MORTI





an instant dislike. Although, to be fair, the feeling is mutual. Thinking they will not be taken seriously, George steals the roll of film from Martin's camera and gets it developed in the village. Unfortunately, they only show Katie's reactions to the sight of Martin being killed. They do find out that it was indeed the dead tramp Guthrie that Edna saw as, rather morbidly, the Manchester Evening News has printed a photograph of him just after he'd been pulled from the river.

While visiting Katie at the local hospital, George has a wander around the seemingly deserted corridors, finding the chilled coffins used to transport the cadavers to the titular Manchester morgue. Surprisingly, even a doctor doesn't seem too bothered that he's making himself at home. A nurse suddenly cries out; she has been attacked by one of the babies in the maternity unit. "This is the third one born since yesterday with incredible aggressiveness", the doctor tells George, roping him in to help administer a sedative. All the children come from the same area of South Gate - near the river. George tells the doctor about the machine he saw in the field, and takes him to see it himself. The scientists tell the doctor the machine works by affecting the insects' nervous system; driving them mad and making them attack each other, "Not even DDT was this effective". They're not impressed with George quizzing them

about side-effects, getting very defensive and insisting that the machine is harmless to humans, as it only affects the very primitive forms of nervous systems, balking, "Do I look like I'm about to attack you? And I'm surrounded by radiation!"

The Inspector, in the meantime, is becoming even more convinced that the "damned hippies" are to blame for the murder; especially since he found them with the photos of Katie at the time of the killing. Suspicious that they are up to something, he sends a PC, Craig (Giorgio Trestini), to follow them. George takes Edna to the churchyard where she first saw Guthrie in an attempt to convince her the dead don't rise. Showing the same tact that he did in the hospital, George takes her down into a crypt, where he proceeds to open some caskets and generally disrespect the corpses. The door suddenly blows shut and as they are trapped within the claustrophobic surroundings, Guthrie suddenly emerges from the shadows. He appears to touch the heads of the other dead - instantly reviving them too. Scrambling for survival, they manage to see an opening in the wall, which leads out into a freshly dug, but thankfully unoccupied grave. PC Craig turns up just as they are reaching the surface, and is shocked to see a resurrected corpse attacking him! Taking shelter, this time in the church, it seems they are once again trapped. The dead are not as docile as

they are slow, as they uproot gravestones and crosses in an attempt to get through the thick church doors. The scene is fantastic, full of tension and genuine anxiety, and is, by the time Craig attempts to retrieve the police radio dropped on the ground outside, an incredibly visceral one. He is overpowered by the zombies and then systematically torn open as they chomp on his organs like a McDonald's burger. It's a graphic and disturbing moment which, along with a later slaying, became notorious when the film hit the video market. When the Inspector finds the scene, it is suggested to him that it could be the work of Satanists, causing the already disgruntled lawman to almost have a thrombosis, "If I could only get mi' hands on them!"

George has put two and two together and figured out that the farmer's machine is causing the dead to rise, so he heads off to destroy it. The farmer and the scientists are none too happy, as would be expected, and since the sonic range has been increased to five miles, George realises that the recently deceased Martin is at risk of resurrection. He's too late though - Martin is up and about and has already killed another policeman and attacked Edna, who just about manages to escape in her Mini, running over the zombieified Martin in the process. However, by the time George arrives to attempt to stop Martin, the police are





living in wait, taking him into custody. The Inspector is furious, convinced that George is spinning a story about corpses coming back to life, accusing him of killing his officers and Devil worship. "It's not my fault that Christ and Saints are out of fashion", George offers as some kind of defense, but he ends up getting struck across the face by the incensed Inspector, his Irish accent veering more towards that of a Boston copper all the time. George manages to escape the police guard, thanks to the old 'hand towel thrown over the face' gag, and dashes to find Edna, who has been taken back to the hospital after becoming hysterical and freaking out a kindly garage owner and her Down's syndrome daughter. He gets there too late as the zombies, led by Martin, have started eating the staff and patients - a gossip receptionist has a breast torn off and her intestines pulled out; the doctor receives a hatchet to the head from a nappy-wearing walker. And he could just be too late to save Edna. Apologies for the spoiler, but the final brilliant quote of the film comes when the Inspector shoots George, "I wish the dead could come back to life, you bastard, then I could kill you

again!" An entertaining, if illogical 'shock' coda works as the pantomime 'villain' gets his comeuppance.

*The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* is truly an international film, directed by a Spaniard, with a mostly Italian crew. Filming took place in 1973, with Dovedale in the Peak District doubling for South Gate; the opening scenes were shot near Manchester Cathedral (George's antique shop has long since gone, replaced by a large office building) and various streets around the Deansgate area of the town - locals will love seeing the old Arndale Centre and such. While the interiors of the hospital and crypt were filmed in a studio in Italy, the church itself is in the Derbyshire village of Hathersage, the actual site of the grave of Robin Hood's Little John. The sign at the entrance to the churchyard, which states: "This is God's acre... Let nothing defile it", wasn't, for once, set dressing and still stands today, unlike the prop gate and signs which the pair walk through to get to the church - they were several miles away at Winnats Pass near Castleton in Derbyshire. Although the pair drive past the church (situated on a hill) earlier in

the film, the building was superimposed, rather realistically it must be said, in post-production.

There's a very strong sense of 'them and us' throughout the film. Particularly with the youngsters and authority. Neither can stand nor understand each other. A normal situation maybe, but one which was heightened following the youth-led revolutions of the sixties, the growth of an underground counterculture and prevalence of drug use. "You're all the same with your long hair and faggot clothes; drugs, sex, every sort of filth" the pre-politically correct Inspector bemoans at one point - George responding with an equally offensive and dismissive, "Heil Hitler!" The fact that Edna's sister appears to live in a respectable area yet is a heroin addict is interesting. One has to assume even these farming and rural communities have their pushers and dealers.

In the end, the Inspector is feeling smug at vanquishing the evil Satanists he believed responsible; "Justice has been a bit slow in these parts with all this permissive rot... maybe people learned a thing or two from my example here".



While the film suffers from the usual re-dubbing of the foreign actors, none of which seem to correctly reflect the locale, the voice talent add a humorous dynamic to the deliberately tongue-in-cheek dialogue. But Grau doesn't treat the story with a light touch. While there's plenty of fun to be had with the lead characters, the ecological message is played out in earnest, particularly with an ominous last shot of the machine still at work in the field. As are the brilliant zombie attacks, and their gut-munching aftermath. Furthermore, it's actually scary. Like Romero's zombie classic, the recently deceased are not the result of some voodoo curse or superstition, but a genuine, horrific threat. The use of the location is equally dramatic: rolling hills and the lush, green countryside is an idyllic setting for such horror, yet also underlines the message of what the advances of science and technology may be doing to the environment. This is offset by the brooding, often disturbing soundtrack. Made up of mostly unearthly groans and throbbing, almost organic, pulsating noises, it's a score which creeps into the mind as much as the machine's radiation penetrates the soil.

As would be expected, the film suffered during the early eighties 'video nasty' palaver, although not prosecuted, it was on the list of seventy-two films which were flagged as 'banned'. When it was finally re-released on tape in the UK in 1985, it was missing two minutes of gore, mainly from the disembowelling of the policeman and the sickening amateur mastectomy. It was finally released uncut in 2002.

Its star, Ray Lovelock, had already appeared in several genre films, notably *Queens of Evil* (1970) where he once again played a hippy character, and his next film was the brilliant *Autopsy* (1975). He still works regularly in Italy. Likewise, Cristina Galbó was a familiar face in Euro horror films, with a memorable appearance in Massimo Dallamano's *What Have You Done to Solange?* (1972) and later, Luigi Cozzi's excellent *The Killer Must Kill Again* (1975). Veteran Arthur Kennedy had an impressive Hollywood career in westerns such as *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941) but by the time age was catching up with him, he was a regular in Euro-crime, fantasy and exploitation films,

such as *The Sentinel* (1977) and *The Humanoid* (1979).

Grau had been a prolific and renowned director of short documentaries and dramas in Spain, but came to the horror world's attention with the excellent 1973 adaptation of the Countess Bathory story, *The Legend of Blood Castle* (*Ceremonia sangrienta*). It's fair to say, however, that none of his other work has been as internationally successful, nor remembered as fondly as *Manchester Morgue*.





CAROLINE PREECE

# The Girl From PLANET



Everyone loves a good baddie. Even if as children we preferred the shiny hair and pretty dresses of the Disney princesses and the charming chivalry of their obligatory prince, growing older and revisiting those fairy tales just makes you realise one thing – the villains are just as, if not more, interesting than the heroes they're trying to bring down. Whether it's *The Little Mermaid's* Ursula, *Peter Pan's* Hook or *Beauty and the Beast's* Gaston, the beautiful thing about those childhood favourites was that the bad guys could be just as lovingly created as the hapless romantics at their centre.

Fairy tale narratives, updated for the screen by Disney or anyone else, are one of the few places where female protagonists have always ruled the roost. There might be lots of exceptions, like *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*, but, such is the will of merchandisers, the Disney Princess brand is world conquering. Without watching the film itself, children might actually think that Princess Jasmine was the star rather than the love interest and, though secondary to the central couples of those classic films, it's also the place where villains were allowed to be powerful women. Some may have been thinly drawn and unambiguously evil, but they stuck in the mind.

And now Hollywood seems to be wising up to that fact, trading lazy remakes

and modern-day fairytales for retellings from the perspective of those Evil Queens and devious matriarchs. That's what *Maleficent*, released in cinemas this month, endeavours to do – show us the story we know from *Sleepy Beauty* and transplant our attentions and affections onto the villain instead of our titular heroine. It's an interesting idea, and one that shockingly hasn't been tried in any high-profile way before. And, by attracting a massive star in Angelina Jolie for the central role, it's clear that the studio is betting on this in a big way.

And they have good reason, as Universal's own rejig, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, was a box office success despite not being received well by critics. While Kristen Stewart's Snow and whatever was going on with those dwarves was a massive problem, one thing everyone managed to agree on was the power of Charlize Theron's Ravenna, equivalent to the 1937 Disney film's unimaginatively named Evil Queen. Ravenna was a triumph in a film without much else going for it, with anger and vengeance mixed with a surprisingly complicated picture of femininity and feminism. Crucially, it would not have been the same without Theron.

So good was the performance, that it wouldn't be surprising to hear it was a direct influence on Disney trying out its

own exercise in refocusing. Angelina Jolie certainly matches up to her in terms of star power, and *Maleficent* is much less shy about announcing its focus on the villain, rather than Princess Aurora, but why do it at all? Does this signal a change in what children want to see in the cinema, or does it mark a move away from making fairy tale movies expressly for kids? The latter would be surprising, as *Tangled* and *Brave* have still managed to seep into public consciousness via young daughters and sons despite the change in the wind.

But *Brave* especially was criticised for giving a little too much time to the female characters, with some dubbing it a 'chick flick' that little boys just wouldn't be interested in (selling kids all over the world short, of course), and one recent example showed this attitude up for its small-mindedness. *Frozen* is a phenomenon and, as with those movies, a lot of that is because of unknowable, primal reasons. One thing that is clear, however, is that *Frozen* had a different attitude towards its characters from the beginning, no doubt spawned by the inordinate amount of time the project sat in gestation. Considered again and again, I don't think anyone could have predicted the impact it would eventually have.

Disney have been trying to adapt *The Snow Queen* since the 1940s, but all attempts before *Frozen* had failed or been put on the backburner while they mined other, easier stories for their family-friendly potential. This difficulty has been attributed to the strangeness of the tale's central character, ostensibly a villain, and how that could be made to appeal to an audience of eager little 'uns expecting a



# Princess Who?

## Why the Evil Queens are Finally Winning



princess, a love story and the triumph of good over evil. Then came 'Let it Go' – one song that apparently forced the movie's writers to reshape the entire first act, the character of Elsa and, in effect, the entire film.

Elsa is supposed to be the villain of the piece, or at least that's how it would have been had *Frozen* been made in decades past, as was the plan. Instead, the film simply chose to focus on two sisters with complicated internal lives and, such is the power of the film right now, it could pave the way for more to come. The fact that people have taken to it, but to Elsa and 'Let it Go' particularly, proves that the demand for complex characters devoid of the innocence and naivety that always characterised the Disney princess (and is actually lampooned in *Frozen* via the Anna character) is a very powerful thing.

It's much the same idea as was celebrated in *Wicked*, a hugely successful stage musical on which a movie adaptation has been teased for years. Centring on *The Wizard of Oz*'s two opposing witches, Glinda and Elphaba, as their bond is forged, fractured and broken, before and during the events of the original Dorothy-centric story, it gave us a different perspective on a previously unambiguous character and proved that twisting well-known stories can indeed make them fresh and relevant again. It also makes it about female friendship,

with the male love interest very much on the periphery.

Our appetite for uncomplicated, all-conquering true love seems to have completely dissipated, reflected in the celebration of *Hunger Games* over other more *Twilight*-esque YA fantasy adaptations, and audiences seem much more interested in seeing the triumph of friendship or familial bonds, as was the case in both *Brave* and *Frozen*. Of course, it's not unlike what we saw in *Toy Story*, *Cars*, or *Monsters Inc.*, also all hugely successful with all demographics, but the shift to having films dominated by female relationships rather than male has led to a new and welcome focus on characters interested in more than just true love's kiss. It's taken a while, but maybe things are finally changing.

That was the whole idea behind ABC's *Once Upon a Time*, of course, with fairytale characters we have been aware of since childhood re-imagined as modern day people. The go-to villain for the show was the Evil Queen, or Regina, who along with her mother, the Queen of Hearts, has become one of the most compelling and beloved characters on the show. People enjoy Snow White and Prince Charming, but the arc of Regina as the adoptive mother of Snow's grandson (it's complicated...) was always one of the best things about a wobbly show. The creators did a similar thing in spin-off *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland*, with the Red Queen (also one of Cinderella's

stepsisters) repurposed as a redeemable central character.

With the imminent release of *Maleficent* and the still unknown influence of *Frozen* yet to come, is this a great new way to explore knotty, interesting characters, or something that threatens to rob today's kids of the uncomplicated comfort we were offered? There will be an argument for the latter, with the trend for deepening and darkening established fairytales with live-action remakes definitely in effect, but not many of us would argue against kids (and their parents for that matter) being exposed to more complex and flawed characters. *Frozen* is a good movie, with a good message, and has been met with enthusiasm from almost all corners.

Underdogs and unlikely heroines come from all backgrounds, not just the dragon-guarded castles and, while I certainly wouldn't condemn characters such as Mulan or Belle for being mindless automatons searching for their one true love, the move towards exploring and humanising characters like Maleficent, Elsa and Snow White's Evil Queen has meant that new, more interesting stories are starting to be told. Disney have finally been brave enough to make an animated movie without the obligatory wedding finale, but with an exploration and reconciliation of a different kind of bond and, as the success of properties like *Wicked* and *Frozen* has suggested, maybe that's what we always wanted in the first place.



# GORDON'S ALIVE!

by Andrew Pollard

With '80s horror classic *RE-ANIMATOR* soon to get the suped-up, extras-crammed Blu-ray Steelbook treatment, we were lucky enough to grab some time with director Stuart Gordon to discuss guts, gore, the musical and more...



**STARBURST:** *Re-Animator* originated from a H.P. Lovecraft story. How did you end up loosely adapting that tale into a movie?  
Stuart Gordon: Well it was one of those things where, when I finally got to read the story, which was difficult as it was out of print at the time, it was all there. It was fantastic, action-packed and fun-filled. I felt like I was holding a treasure map in my hand.

But we're guessing the actual shoot presented quite a few challenges...  
It was gruelling. 18 days! On the last day we shot continuously for 36 hours. At the end of it all, I couldn't see – I went blind! I was driving home and suddenly my eyes stopped working and I had to pull off to the side of the road. It was well worth it, actually. If I hadn't done that movie, I don't think I would be making films today.

During the time it was being made, a lot of films were getting chopped and changed by censorship boards. How difficult was it to deal with that possibility?

*Re-Animator* was released unrated, so it meant that it was never censored at all, which was fantastic. I kinda wish all movies were released that way. Actually, from the first time we showed it in the UK until now was censored. I'm very grateful that they've restored it to the way that it should be.

And the latest Blu-ray has the Unrated cut and the Integral cut of the movie. For those unaware, what are the main differences

between these versions?

Well the big scene in the movie is referred to as "the head gives head". I think that was cut when it was shown in the UK. So they thought that was something that should not be seen by subjects of the British realm.

It's certainly a unique scene, and even now it still makes people squirm.

Yeah, it's still as filthy, and freaks people out, which is one of the reasons why I think there's never been a remake of *Re-Animator*... because you'd have to include that scene. And I don't think studios are ready to do that today.

A big part of the success of the film is Jeffrey Combs as Herbert West. How did you come across him?

It was our casting director who discovered him. He saw him in a play, and he knew when he saw him that this was the guy. And when he walked in, we all said, "Absolutely, yes, this is Herbert West." The Herbert West that's described in the story is blonde with blue eyes. Jeffrey is brunette, but his attitude was pure Herbert West.

He has that unassuming, but cold and clinical look to him.

Exactly! He doesn't suffer fools gladly.

With films now looking glossy and often overly enhanced, *Re-Animator* was a film that was full of very real, practical effects. That's right. And that's why we were able to do it more recently on stage.





In the movie, there's a lot of gore and blood involved. How messy did that set get? I just remember my shoes were sticking to the floor all the time.

What was the dirtiest, messiest scene to shoot then?

Oh boy, it's hard to think. I guess the finale of the movie. Heads are crushed, bodies are torn to pieces and so forth. We were wading through the gore up to our knees. I think they ended up using something like 30 gallons of blood in the film.

Where do you stand with the more modern films and their reliance on CGI effects?

I think it's too bad, as it loses a lot of impact. I think CG is kind of deadening; there's no sense of danger. I think if it's done sparingly, where it's a mixture of effects, then I think it can work. But they're lazy; they're doing everything in post-production now. And it also doesn't leave anything to the imagination of the audiences. Audiences like to be put to work! Now you just sit back and watch the movie wash over you, and you feel disconnected from it.

As people who are big fans of '80s horror, we much prefer the practical effects that were used back then...

The actors can interact with it all. Now it's green screen and they can't see what's going on. I think when you mix it up is when you can get the best work done. They don't wanna take the time on what they're shooting, it feels like. The movie that really sums it up for me is *Grindhouse*. You've got Rodriguez's film [*Planet Terror*], then you've got Tarantino's [*Death Proof*] which was all practical. And Tarantino's was so much more exciting and thrilling. If anyone had any doubts about keeping it real, those movies made a very strong case for practical effects. It was interesting, because when you saw them together they use almost the same cast of actors in both films. One of them had almost no effects - Rodriguez's was almost dead in the water - but Tarantino's was full of life.

On the *Re-Animator* front, Brian Yuzna went on to direct the sequels. What are your thoughts on those, and were you ever in line to direct them yourself at any point?

No, I was not really interested because they were insisting that they be rated R, which really limited the possibilities. The thing that was exciting about the first movie is that it was anything goes; you didn't have to worry about censorship. When you have to put it into a box, you lose so much of what makes *Re-Animator* special.

For a few years, the idea and talk of *House of Re-Animator* possibly happening has been floated around, with yourself to direct. Is there any chance that that could still happen?

It's possible. With *Re-Animator*, death is just the beginning. I like to say. Nothing is ever dead in *Re-Animator*'s world. It's possible at some point that we'll be able to get that going.

And the plan for that is that Herbert West is brought in to bring a US President back to life?

Yeah, that was the premise, that they have to re-animate the President of the United States. That's a compelling idea.

Away from *Re-Animator*, you ended up co-writing *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*. How was it working on something that was so far removed from this extreme gore?

Well there wasn't a lot of gore, but the thing I keep reminding people is that *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* was a horror movie. There's this mad scientist whose experiment goes terribly wrong, and you have giant insects and all the staples of the '50s horror films. We did the sequel to it, *Honey, I Blew up the Kid*. We were borrowing heavily from *The Amazing Colossal Man*, who attacks Las Vegas, which is what the baby does in the movie. And we got this phone call, just as the movie was about to be released, from Disney's legal department going, "Do you realise that there's another movie that has



**"On the last day of RE-ANIMATOR we shot continuously for 36 hours. At the end of it all, I couldn't see – I went blind!"**

**- STUART GORDON**

all of these same things in it?" And we were like, "Yes, of course!"

Sticking with the writing, you also did work with Brian on the likes of *The Dentist* and *Body Snatchers*. Do you prefer to write for others or for yourself?

It's fun to be writing your own film, but it's also fun to be able to write something for someone else.

Do you find yourself becoming more precious about a script if you give it to somebody and they do their own thing with it?

Well the thing that's good about directing something that you've written is that you

don't have to worry about the director playing with it. You can do it in your vision.

You touched on it earlier, but there's *Re-Animator: The Musical*. It seems like a crazy idea! How did it come to be? People kept coming up to me and suggesting this idea, and I kept laughing and thinking that they were insane. Then finally it struck me that *Re-Animator's* effects are practical and we can do them live on stage. So I rounded up the original effects crew, and they came back and we did the musical together. As a matter of fact, we did it at the Edinburgh Festival a few years ago.

And is it still running in the States?

It's not, but it's about to be remarketed, so it will be back. As I said, *Re-Animator* is never dead! We have the original team back, and it's great to be working with them. It's funny, when I re-watch the movie again, I expect them to start singing.

What else can we expect from yourself?

I've just opened a play here in Los Angeles called *Taste*, which is based on a true story where a man puts an ad on the internet for somebody he can cook and eat. It's a cooking show so we have a working kitchen. It's based on a real story that

happened in 2001. They didn't know each other until they met and went through with it, and he ended up eating, I think, 45lbs of the other guy.

Is there a dark humour to *Taste* or is it played straight?

We've had people faint during the production, so it's pretty strong stuff. I was sitting next to the guy who fainted, then I had to help him out.

So does that bring a sense of guilt or a sense of pride at being able to do that? Of course, you're worried and want to make sure that he's alright. Then when you realise that they are and it was the horror of the play that caused them to faint, there is something about it that makes you realise how strong theatre can be. There are stories that go back all the way to ancient Greece of audience members fainting and women having miscarriages because of what they saw on stage. That's the thing about theatre, is that it's live, it's real, it's not an image on a screen, it's really happening. And that makes it powerful.

+

**The new and improved RE-ANIMATOR: LIMITED EDITION 2-DISC STEELBOOK is released on June 2nd.**



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# EVACUATE TOKYO!

THE GODZILLA STORY

## PART 2

by Robin Pierce

With Gareth Edwards' *GODZILLA* currently laying waste to multiplexes around the world, we conclude our comprehensive look back at the King of the Monsters' sixty years in cinema...



### THE HEISEI ERA (1984 - 1995)

Though maligned, Godzilla wasn't forgotten by the public. Merchandise was selling well, and re-releases of the films were still attracting audiences to cinemas. In a film festival celebrating Toho's fiftieth year, the Godzilla movies drew more audiences than more conventionally accepted classics like *The Seven Samurai*. It was estimated at the time that over 65 million people had watched a Godzilla film and a worldwide fan club for the King of the Monsters boasted over two hundred thousand members on its books. It was time to awaken the beast from his hibernation...

### Godzilla 1985 (1984\*)

#### (aka *The Return of Godzilla*)

Released in Japan in late 1984 and the United States the following year, *Godzilla 1985* was a powerful reboot and return to form. It scrapped the continuity of every film apart from the first – so this was Godzilla's second visit to Japan, no longer Japan's protector nor a friend to all the world's children – he was a hungry reptilian predator with an animal's instinct for survival. His design had also changed subtly, with a dialing down of the more goofy, Barney-esque elements of his appearance.

And so, Tokyo is well and truly trampled anew by the now eighty metre tall monster. At an official height of fifty metres, the growing Tokyo skyline would've dwarfed the Showa era version of the monster. In terms of concepts, here Godzilla is hungry after his thirty-year sleep, and wants to feed off Japan's nuclear reactors, but a canny scientist notices that Godzilla's distracted by the same homing instinct as birds, so this signal is replicated, luring the beast to the mouth of a live volcano where he is surrounded by explosive charges that trigger an eruption. Falling in to the volcano, he is trapped forever. But forever isn't nearly as long as the Japanese authorities would wish...

### Godzilla vs. Biollante (1989)

Take some Godzilla cells found in the ruins of Tokyo by a scientific team following the rampage in the earlier film, add a grief-stricken scientist examining the psychic power of roses (?) who splices the DNA from Godzilla with the DNA of a (presumably vexed) rose, and that of his daughter who was blown to pieces by terrorists, and you have a brand new monster called Biollante. It is every bit as off-the-wall crazy as its sounds, and is the result of yet another public competition to find a new opponent. This one was won by a dentist.

Luckily, terrorists make good on their threat to the Japanese government to detonate a bomb that will release Godzilla from his lava tomb, and it's time to fight the giant rose monster. Giant rose monsters don't fare well against radioactive breath and Biollante dissolves into space bound spores, after which Godzilla heads out to sea, his job done.

If the monstrous rose creature didn't exactly set the *kaiju* world alight, at least the film gave us an enduring recurring character in human telepath Miki Saegusa (played by Megumi Okada, who has the distinction of playing the longest running human character in any *kaiju* series). Miki shares a psychic link with Godzilla and would appear in each of the remaining Heisei era films.

### Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah (1991)

Following the lacklustre response to the "new" monster in the previous film, it was time to bring back Godzilla's arch enemy. This film also visits Godzilla's origins, as Japanese troops in the Second World War encounter a *Godzillasaurus* which helps them wipe out the invading American army. The island is later destroyed by American hydrogen bomb test a few months before the mutated Godzilla attacked Japan. Ghidorah's origins are also examined as three small artificial creatures

from the future called Dorats are mutated into the three-headed dragon by the radiation from the same explosion. It's all the fault of the Futurans, evil time-travellers who plot to use Ghidorah to destroy Japan, thus preventing it from becoming the economic leader of the planet – something that has happened in their timeline.

Having the middle head torn off in battle, Ghidorah gets a bionic upgrade from the Futurans and becomes Mecha King Ghidorah with new cybernetic parts. Cyber or not, Godzilla wins, dropping his adversary into the ocean.

### Godzilla vs. Mothra (1992)

Godzilla, Mothra and Batra (a Mothra larvae) do spectacular battle once more in a repetitive triumph of style over substance. Godzilla is dropped into the sea at the end, yet again. Nothing really new here, and nothing is added to the Godzilla myths.

### Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla 2 (1993)

The title implies that it's a sequel to the 1974 Showa entry, but it really isn't. It's not even the second film in the Mechagodzilla strand – that happened in 1975. The Mechagodzilla we see here isn't a remote controlled drone created by aliens, in this precursor to *Pacific Rim*, he's a manned battle robot specifically created to keep Godzilla at bay and is created from the remains of Mecha King Ghidorah.

A strange pteranodon egg emits a signal that attracts the attention of both the long absent Rodan and Godzilla, but while the monsters fight, the egg is whisked away (sorry) by a group of research scientists. It hatches, revealing a baby Godzilla (thankfully, not as gratingly cute and bumbling as Minya/Minilla). Godzilla heads to Japan to retrieve his offspring, fights and defeats Mechagodzilla, who bonds with another flying robot called Garuda to become Super Mechagodzilla, locates the baby and adopts him.





# 破 壊 神 降 臨



## Godzilla vs. Space Godzilla (1994)

When Godzilla fought Biollante, some of his cells went into space with the spores. Radiation emanating from a black hole mutate these into a bigger and nastier Space Godzilla, who comes to earth and attacks Little Godzilla and almost kills Godzilla himself, when he is overwhelmed by the new kid on the block's power. In a climactic battle, Godzilla blinds his opponent by gouging out his eyes, while a new Japanese super weapon, a combination jet fighter and tank intended to replace Mechagodzilla, provide the backup.

## Godzilla vs. Destroyer (1995)

Godzilla fans all around the world gasped in disbelief when Toho announced that they were finally killing off Godzilla. Even worse, there were rumblings that Hollywood were making a Godzilla film of their own.

If this was to be the end, then Toho were going to take Godzilla out with not just a bang, but a BIG bang of nuclear proportions with a movie that paid homage to the series' beginnings.

Godzilla is dying. Glowing red, he is suffering a meltdown. When his body reaches 1200 degrees Celsius, he will explode with the force of a thousand nukes and take the bulk of the planet with him or alternatively, will literally melt and his remains will burn their way to the planet's core. Either way, when he goes, he's taking the world with him.

Experiments with a new oxygen destroyer do nothing more than mutate some spores into becoming Destroyer, and thus, a new menace is unwittingly created, becomes out of control and wrecks Tokyo.

Godzilla Junior is now a fully grown adult, and is led by telepath Miki to assist Godzilla. Destroyer nearly kills Junior, but is blasted by Senior. In a sensitively shot scene, both Godzillas say their goodbyes before Godzilla gives off one final, weakened roar before dying. The Japanese authorities save the planet with some freezing weaponry, which







stops Senior from burning a hole through the planet, but Tokyo is uninhabitable due to Godzilla's radiation.

But what of Junior? In the final sequence, Junior rises, bigger than ever, having been revived by his father's ebbing power. Godzilla WILL be back one day, but the Heisei series was over and their star was going Hollywood. Or was he?

#### Godzilla (1998)

It could hardly be said that Godzilla was back in 1998, despite the imposing poster of a giant reptilian foot stomping down in Times Square. "Size does matter," said the tagline. "Plot does matter," quipped George Lucas at the time — and he was the man preparing to unleash *The Phantom Menace* a year later.

Hollywood's Godzilla isn't a Godzilla movie in any meaningful way. Flushed with the success of *Independence Day*, the Devlin/Emmerich team gave us a spectacular giant lizard on the loose film, but missed the charm and allure of even the weakest Toho film completely. The story was an updated remake of *Gojira*, substituting New York for Tokyo, but without its predecessor's quirkiness, even if the mighty multi-story beast does somehow manage to defy logic by hiding in one of the world's densest populated cities. Director Roland Emmerich went on record saying he wasn't a fan of the original movies and would only helm the film if he could handle the material his way.

Meeting his end tangled in the cables of the Brooklyn Bridge under a hail of missiles, it was the hostile reception by audiences and critics that actually played all chances of the proposed trilogy being produced, faster than an oxygen destroyer ever could.

#### THE SHINSEI/MILLENNIUM ERA

On reflection, it can be justifiably said that the Showa series became known for its goofy campiness, the Heisei series became referred to as "the versus series"

and became convoluted and confused in its plotting. The final era though, presented a series of majestic giant monster epics with higher production values and more stunning special effects spectacle than ever before. And it all kicked off a year after the lamentable Western effort.

#### Godzilla 2000 (1999)

Hollywood had blown their chance. Godzilla was back home at Toho and reasonably enough, the character needed a reboot and a new look to save face. *Godzilla 2000* would overlook the 1998 film and introduce a bigger, leaner, meaner version of their reptilian superstar from the film's opening reel.

Godzilla rises from the ocean and is even more savagely destructive than we've seen him before, and once again as it's another reboot, it's the first time he's made landfill since the mid fifties. From the outset, it's plain to see this is no saviour of Japan against various monster from space, mythology or other Toho franchises — this is an unreasonable beast. He's hungry and looking for food. This is easily the most daunting and impressive Godzilla we've seen yet and easily washes away the aftertaste of the 1998 film.

Obviously, a newly reinvented Godzilla needed a new foe to vanquish as if the massed ranks of the Japanese defence force (army and air) aren't enough, and so a new monster — Orga — was introduced.

Orga was an alien monster, created from Godzilla's DNA and is determined to make itself a full clone of Godzilla with its capability to absorb more and more of DNA as they battle, but is destroyed when Godzilla places his head inside the mouth of Orga and blasts his radioactive beam. Ordinarily, this would be the happy ending that audiences had come to expect, but there's more.

As the film draws to a close with much of their Tokyo battleground in ruins, the grateful

survivors ponder why Godzilla defends them even though he had been attacked by Japan's armed forces. Sadly, they spoke too soon as Godzilla then unexpectedly blasts what's left of Tokyo into oblivion, making it a radioactive wasteland and leaving audiences wondering what on Earth just happened!

#### Godzilla vs. Megaguirus (2000)

The Japanese have an experimental weapon which fires black holes at the enemy. Sadly, it also has the effect of opening a wormhole which allows a giant dragonfly egg to fall through into our dimension. The egg mutates into Megaguirus, a giant flying insect whose powers include not only a scorpion-like stinger, but also radioactive breath similar to Godzilla's. Fortunately, Godzilla's breath is stronger and he saves the day, only to be rewarded by having a black hole lobbed at him by the authorities.

#### Godzilla, Mothra and King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack (2001)

When they say "all out attack" — they really mean it. This is one of the best films in the entire series.

As Godzilla once again attacks, we return to the premise from *Godzilla Raids Again* that it's NOT the same beast over and over in a new reworking of the continuity. Toho even gives the 1998 film a nod in a mention that a similar creature attacked New York at the end of the last century.

Godzilla battles with Baragon (a giant red four-legged monster who can burrow with his rhino horn and blast a heat ray from his mouth and had starred in previous Toho *kaiju* films). In a surprising plot device that works well, the saga's continuity is overhauled again as Baragon, Mothra and Ghidorah are now established as legendary Guardian Monsters of ancient Japanese mythology who will rise and save Japan before Godzilla, who seems to have more mystical origins than nuclear testing this time. However, it's a missile



inserted into a gaping wound that actually stops Godzilla in his tracks, disintegrating his body, but his heart beats on...

#### Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla 3 (2002)

In a new twist, Mechagodzilla is a bio-mechanical robot which includes some of Godzilla's DNA, extracted from the bones of the original who died by means of the oxygen destroyer. The bones were retrieved and are now hidden by the government. This causes technical problems when confronted with the real thing. Godzilla's mighty roar bring back memories of the original's death, sending the robot on a rampage through Tokyo until he runs out of power. After repairs, a pitched battle ensues where the robot beats a badly injured Godzilla into retreat, but is itself missing an arm.

#### Godzilla: Tokyo S.O.S. (2003)

(aka *Godzilla x Mothra* & *Mechagodzilla: Tokyo S.O.S.*)

Whilst Mechagodzilla is being repaired, Japan lives in fear of Godzilla rising again, which naturally he soon does, destroying a nuclear sub on his way. The faeries of Infant Island state that Godzilla's bones need to be returned to the sea and never touched by humans again. In return for having the bones consigned to the ocean, Mothra will gladly take Mechagodzilla's place as the Earth's guardian. If the bones are not returned, Mothra will destroy us. Mention is made of Mothra's earlier attack on Tokyo, wiping out the plot point of *Giant Monsters All Out Attack*, and we're back to the original continuity of the Showa era.

So, a three-way battle ensues, with Mothra succumbing to Godzilla's radioactive blast, Mechagodzilla again faltering when hearing the roar, two Batra (Mothra larvae) once again smother Godzilla's body with their cocoon webbing, and his bones are consigned to the sea as Mechagodzilla tethers himself to the monster and crashes into the Japan Trench in an act of noble suicide.

We would live happily ever after, except a post credits sting shows us that a secret lab contains the DNA of ALL the Toho monsters. And they're being experimented with. Sadly, this intriguing plot thread was never explored.

#### Godzilla: Final Wars (2005)

Godzilla was fifty, and to celebrate his landmark birthday, Toho gave him a massive send off, while Hollywood gave him a star on the walk of fame. After half a century of destruction over 27 films, Toho's twenty-eighth outing for their scaly workhorse threw everything they had into the mix. Practically every monster made an appearance, being controlled, of course, by evil double-crossing aliens who dress and fight as if they've wandered in off a *Matrix* set.

Favourites like King Ghidorah and Mothra, as well as long-unseen favourites like King Caesar, Ebirah,

Anguris, Rodan, Minya (here under his sometime alias of Minilla) are all back for one last bout – the gang's all here. Godzilla has to fight just about every menace he's ever faced, and in one memorable fan-pleasing sequence even quickly eradicates the '98 version, referred to simply as 'Zilla, by chucking him into the Sydney Opera House and blasting him with radiation.

Continuity is yet again thrown to the wind as this film embraces every single era of Godzilla, including some fights shot and choreographed lovingly in the campy Showa style. Nope, it doesn't make a grain of sense if you try to apply any logic, but what the hell, essentially it's a party.

The only monsters surviving at the end are Mothra, who flies back to Infant Island, Godzilla and Minya, who wander off into the sunset, after Minya has prevented Godzilla from frying what appear to be the last group of humans on the planet. The implication is that Godzilla has finally forgiven us for all we've done to him, from his creation onwards. The war is over and Godzilla is at peace with everything and everybody.

Good guy, bad guy, fearsome monster, protector, guardian. Over the years, Godzilla has played many roles and it's hard to pin down which is the definitive one. It seems there's a version in there somewhere to suit all tastes, and as to his enduring popularity, maybe it was said best at the end of *Godzilla 2000*: "Godzilla is inside all of us".

Legendary Pictures' *GODZILLA* is in cinemas now.







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# UP FROM THE DEPTHS

by Spleeny Dotson

Inspired by Big G's latest cinematic bow, we cast our minds back 36 years to a considerably less credible time in his long career; a time of **GODZILLA THE ANIMATED SERIES...**

## "Thirty stories high, breathing fire, his head in the sky..."

This was the very literal-minded introduction to the hero of Hanna-Barbera's 1978 cartoon featuring the adventures of the crew of the Calico and their big, green and very familiar protector. Now, it must be said, a city-eating giant mutant reptile, best known for rampaging through Tokyo, leaving a trail of destruction, isn't perhaps the most natural inspiration for a children's cartoon. However, by the late 1970s the undeniable popularity of the *Godzilla* franchise amongst people of all ages must have set cash registers ringing amongst the top brass of Hanna-Barbera, for an erstwhile city-eating giant mutant reptile it was that became the hero of this cartoon.

### A FISTFUL OF FRANCHISES

Hanna-Barbera had really gotten into its stride during the 1970s. After building success during the '60s with popular shows like *Scooby Doo*, *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*, alongside cult classics like *The Wacky Races* (plus its spin-offs) and *The Adventures of Jonny Quest*, the company was now increasingly resembling a production line, churning out cartoon ideas like they

were cel-shaded sausages (*Josie and the Pussycats*, *Inch High*, *Private Eye*, *Hong Kong Phooey*, *Jabberjaw*, *Sealab 2020*, *Goober and the Ghost Chasers*, *The New Schmoos*, *The Funky Phantom*, the list goes on). Amongst these were a number of franchise-based cartoons that Hanna-Barbera must have seen as ripe for cashing in on (some more ripe than others). This, by no means exhaustive, list included *The Addams Family*, *Jeannie*

(a spin-off of *I Dream of Jeannie*), *The Partridge Family 2200 AD* (we shit you not), *The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan* (as in fictional detective Charlie not factual martial artist Jackie), *The Gary Coleman Show* (taking advantage of the actor's success in *Diff'rent Strokes*), *The Harlem Globetrotters* and, only just post-dating *Godzilla*, the inexplicably time-travel based *Fonz and the Happy Days Gang*. Against a list like this, a cartoon featuring *Godzilla* as a hero begins to seem positively tame. We may consider ourselves lucky that he and the crew of *Calico* weren't also a touring rock band – a weird recurring theme in much of Hanna-Barbera's output of the time.

Hanna-Barbera had already tried their hand at making popular movie



monsters into cartoon good guys with *Frankenstein, Jr. and the Impossibles*, a show which also shared voice talent with Godzilla (we'll come back to the issue of Godzilla's voice in a bit).

The animation and character design was pretty typical Hanna-Barbera action cartoon fare. Cheaply reproduced shots of characters running against a scrolling background and re-used frames abounded, as with much of Hanna-Barbera's '70s output, and the depth of characterisation barely got beyond 'tough guy', 'clever lady', 'comic relief'. The cartoon ran for just two series, from 1978-1980, though with repeats its shelf life was a little longer.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The central characters of the cartoon were the crew of the Calico, a scientific expedition travelling the world and... er... stumbling over giant monsters.

The captain was the square-jawed and impressively bearded Captain Carl Majors, with the driving force behind the whole expedition being Dr. Quinn Darien, a scientist with no very clear specialism or, as mentioned, remit for her journeys of partly scientific but mostly giant monster-based discovery. Alongside them were Dr. Quinn's research assistant, a young black man named Brock, and her blond-haired nephew, Pete (there was never any mention of how Pete's parents felt about his Auntie jaunting him around the world and exposing him to ceaseless peril, but we guess the '70s were a more innocent, carefree age in that respect).

For reasons, and from sources, never disclosed Captain Carl Majors had a small metal box with an important looking red button on it riding permanently at his hip. One press of the button and a signal was sent out to summon Godzilla, wherever he might be in the world, who would rush to the aid of

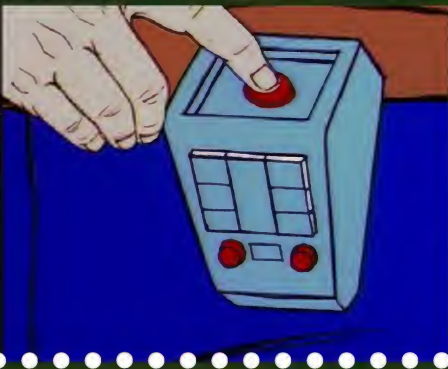


the Calico and crew. Even as a child this writer always wondered why, whenever the button was pressed, Godzilla never seemed to be more than a quick swim away. Obviously Godzilla is very big, and in this incarnation, a more-or-less Olympic quality swimmer, but come on, credulity can only be stretched so far. I also never quite understood why Godzilla was so pliantly summoned, which might explain why the series scared me so much as a child - I half-imagined that the sonic signal compelled him in a way that might at any moment wear off and see him revert to type and tear the Calico's crew into so many strips of shark bait!

## GODZILLA...

Which brings us to the depiction of the city-stomping reptile himself. Most likely relating to a licensing issue, Hanna-Barbera eschewed the iconic high-pitched dinosaur wail the creature is synonymous

with... in favour of Lurch from *The Adam's Family* making roaring noises. No, honestly. Not ridiculous enough that Godzilla made "ruuhar, rur, raaargh" noises like an over-enthusiastic uncle let loose with his nephew's dinosaur toys, but the man behind the vocalisations was also Ted Cassidy, the actor behind Lurch, as well as equally memorable characters such as Injun Joe in *The New Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Bigfoot in the *Six Million Dollar Man* and Ruk the Android in the *What Are Little Girls Made Of?* episode of *Star Trek*. Alongside a number of Hanna-Barbera characters (particularly villains), including the aforementioned *Frankenstein, Jr.*, Cassidy also voiced both Lou Ferrigno's *Incredible Hulk* in the infamous '70s live-action series, as well as narrating the program's opening, and the Gorn slain in one-on-one combat by William Shatner in the first series of *Star Trek*. As much as this is an impressive voiceover track record, the Japanese





redubs of the cartoon wisely featured Toho's roaring noise in favour of the roaring-uncle-with-dinosaur-toys-routine.

Godzilla's fearsome atomic breath was also not on show (too scary?! ) and was replaced by simple, common-or-garden fire breath (as the lyrics of the theme tune made clear) and the unique but inexplicable decision to allow him to fire laser beams from his eyes, like a reptilian Superman.

The show featured no Kaiju from the Godzilla movies but instead utilised a roster of legendary creatures (a phoenix of some kind, a minotaur, cyclops, chimera and at least two dragons) and cobbled together scary animals (a variety of giant flies, beetles, eels, squids and sharks, a magnetic turtle and even a cyborg whale) all of which Godzilla bashed up, threw into buildings and mountains and stamped on, as far as the labours of the animators were willing to allow.

The look of Hanna-Barbera's Godzilla was different from previous Toho depictions. For one it was consistently green rather than the original whale-ish grey, its arms were more flexible and human-like, it could jump impressive

distances and varied radically in size from one scene to the next but, most importantly, this Godzilla had... er... we don't know how to describe it... he had, well... very kind eyes. Big and dark and soft. Almost doe-ish. Even allowing for the fact that lasers came out of them.

Understandably, Hanna-Barbera's animators didn't want to traumatised children with anything too monstrous as a hero but this loveable, soft-edged Godzilla could never be described as a fan favourite.

#### ...AND GODZOOKY

Which brings us neatly round to his nephew (or cousin, depending on who you talk to). Godzooky was, without question, the Scrappy-Doo of this outfit, with all the attendant popularity with the viewing public that such a role brings. He had peculiar little armpit wings and could sort of almost fly, in as much as the slapstick comic relief moment demanded him to, pretty much always resulting in a "hilarious" comedy pratfall. He could also try to breath fire, although this essentially entailed disgorging 'comical' puffs of smoke and... well... that's about it. What else he was good for is anyone's guess,

except for furthering the plot by getting into the kind of trouble that no viewer of any age would ever want something so annoying to ever escape.

He was the best friend of Dr. Darien's nephew Pete (one might almost call him Pete's *Dragon*, hmmm...) and the two of them consistently invited themselves up as monster food without Hanna-Barbera ever delivering the goods and having them devoured.

Ok, maybe not, but it sure wasn't the greatest of '70s cartoons either. Certainly the chief merit of the series was that, for many of us, it was a first point of contact with all things Godzilla. Without the series our much younger selves might not have heard of, less still sought out, any of the *Godzilla* movies that have made a substantially deeper and more positive impact on our lives than the adventures of the crew of the *Calico* ever did. For that, if nothing else, we thank Hanna-Barbera from the bottom of our hearts.

Perhaps for good reason, *GODZILLA* is currently unavailable on any format in the UK.





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# MOVIE REVIEWS



## CHEAP THRILLS

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: E.L. KATZ / SCREENPLAY: DAVID CHIRCHIRILLO, TRENT HAAGA / STARRING: PAT HEALY, ETHAN EMBRY, DAVID KOECHNER, SARA PAXTON / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 6TH

Think Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*, think Gareth Edwards' *Monsters*. Great directorial debuts, films all produced for not much at all that made a big impression on genre fans. Well, now you can add another to the list, because E.L. Katz's *Cheap Thrills* is an astonishingly assured and well-crafted piece of work that deserves a huge audience.

After being served an eviction notice and then being laid off, down on his luck new father Craig (Healy) ends up in a bar, where he meets high school friend Vince (Embry) who he hasn't seen in about five years. The two of them encounter a wealthy couple Colin and Violet (Koechner and Paxton) who are not shy of dishing out their cash as it is Violet's birthday. Colin begins to issue dares that start out relatively harmless (\$50 to smack a stripper's behind, etc) but soon escalate into a cavalcade of the grotesque. Craig and Vince find themselves thrust into competition with each other in a battle of greed

and desperation that leads to ever increasing violence.

The film that *Cheap Thrills* does most reminiscent of is *Reservoir Dogs* as it takes place mostly in one location and has brilliant characters with well written, real-sounding dialogue. It also escalates the tension in a very natural way that never feels contrived. As the stakes increase and the desperation mounts, you are right there with the characters and in your head you start to play a game: what would you do when faced with the same situation.

Even though many of the characters' actions are despicable, somehow they all remain likeable thanks to the brilliant performances. Pat Healy is an actor who is becoming really fascinating to watch with each new role; his character is the window into this awful night and because we start with him, he remains the anchor for the audience's sympathy and fulfills this role very easily. Ethan Embry plays

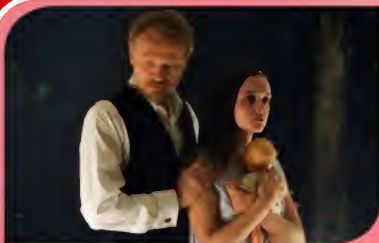
a low-life thug a world away from the teen idol characters he started his career with, but he gives a seemingly shallow character hidden depths as the film goes on. David Koechner is an actor mainly known for bit parts in raucous comedies but here his performance is more mannered and subtle and somehow absolutely chilling and one that stays with you.

Knowing very little about the unsavoury places that *Cheap Thrills* goes is probably the best way to see the film; its dark, funny, unsettling and sneaks up on you. E.L. Katz has made a black comedic masterpiece for these troubled times and proves to be a great storyteller and a major new talent.

CHRIS HOLT

EXPECTED ++++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++++ 9



## THE QUIET ONES

**CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JOHN POGUE / SCREENPLAY: CRAIG ROSENBERG, JOHN POGUE, OREN MOVERMAN, TOM DE VILLE / STARRING: JARED HARRIS, SAM CLAFLIN, OLIVIA COOKE, ERIN RICHARDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

The Quiet Ones is a movie that's been highly anticipated by certain corners of the horror community. The central focus of this Hammer horror is Oxford professor Joseph Coupland (Harris) and his small group of students as they look to document parapsychological happenings within a lady by the name of Jane Harper (Cooke). The big question of the day is whether these crazed goings-on

are actual parapsychological occurrences or simply something that is rooted in the mind of the troubled Jane.

Apparently based on true events, The Quiet Ones has a very strong opening and a lot of potential. As we get a closer look into the entity, dubbed Evie, that has an apparent hold over Jane, there's good, dramatic tension and a rich, borderline-Gothic charm to Pogue's movie. Sadly,

though, the second half of The Quiet Ones doesn't live up to the stellar groundwork laid down by the film's early moments. What unravels before our eyes is a story that comes across as played out, clichéd and unappealing.

Whilst the film doesn't live up to the underground buzz that it has received, there are still plenty of positives on show. Two in particular are the performances of Harris and Cooke, a duo who seem to have a perfect handle on what their characters should be. The supporting cast are adequate and passable, but Harris and Cooke clearly outshine their cohorts here. Similarly, the film's first half clearly outshines its latter. Despite the flaws of the second half, this British horror takes its time to craft a well-delivered first 40 minutes or so.

Unfortunately, The Quiet Ones, despite being far from awful, is hard to label as anything more than disappointing. Whether we expected more from this latest Hammer production or it's just the case that we were let down by the film failing to maximise

on the strong, promise-laced first half, The Quiet Ones paints a frustrating picture. For all its style, charm and appeal, it just feels like a massively missed opportunity to deliver a truly great British horror film that matches some of the classic tales of yesteryear.

A steady effort that threatens to do something stunning and unique, The Quiet Ones seems to lose its nerve halfway through and revert to the usual plot points and familiar happenings that we've seen far too often in horror films of the last decade. Still, some strong performances and a few choice scares will provide horror fans with enough entertainment to give The Quiet Ones a certain appeal. As we said, the film is far from a complete dud, it just comes across as a ballsy little number that decided to sit on the fence halfway through and revert back to the usual horror clichés we've become accustomed to over the years.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 5



## THE WIND RISES

**CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: HAYAO MIYAZAKI / SCREENPLAY: HAYAO MIYAZAKI / STARRING: JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT, JOHN KRASINSKI, EMILY BLUNT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

For decades, Hayao Miyazaki has made it his mission to deliver top-notch animated fare to the masses, going above and beyond in making each film fun, unique, and incredibly entertaining. He's dabbled in many genres, and even dared to blend some that had no business being put together. His work ranges from the fantastical to the grounded, injecting each project with a level of emotion

and magic that is all too rare. It is with heavy hearts, then, that we here at STARBURST realise this is the last Miyazaki film we'll get to review. It's been an exciting and memorable run, and his retirement will definitely have a significant impact on both the industry and our emotions.

If he's going out, he'd want to go out strong, and that's exactly what he does with his poignant, moving, and thoughtful

swan song. What at first seems to be a biopic about a gifted aeronautical engineer quickly transforms into a haunting, contemplative, and touching tale about love, loss, and the price of passion. Miyazaki carefully illustrates his point with cleverly placed symbolism and surrealism, turning what could have been a bland historical piece into a creative commentary on the price one must pay for success.

Jiro can't fly aeroplanes on account of his near crippling vision impairment, but he can design them like nobody's business. His love for airborne machines thrusts him into the complicated and controversial world of aeronautical engineering, where he learns that the key to success isn't all just knowing nuts and bolts. Fate and a massive earthquake introduce him to Naoko, the beautiful daughter of a Japanese hotel owner and the future love of his life. Naoko becomes infatuated with Jiro, and after years of being apart, the two become reacquainted and kindle a romance. But Jiro soon finds out that Naoko is suffering from tuberculosis and

is dying before his eyes. With Naoko's days numbered and an aeroplane to complete, Jiro is torn between his dream and his love.

The film's most glaring misstep is its plodding pace. No one should expect high-octane action or perilous danger, but long stretches of minimal plot progression and dull character exchanges isn't exactly welcome here, either. It really is a shame that the movie's middle act suffers, but its strong opening and its even more powerful final scenes pack such a punch that at the end of the day, this complaint turns out to be fairly trivial.

The Wind Rises is anime in its deepest, most incredible form, presenting themes and ideas that will no doubt spark some fierce controversy but that will also move and inspire countless viewers. We salute you, Mr. Miyazaki, and all of the groundbreaking things you have done for cinema.

HAYDEN MEARS

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 9



## BLUE RUIN

**CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JEREMY SAULNIER / SCREENPLAY: JEREMY SAULNIER / STARRING: MACON BLAIR, DEVIN RATRAY, AMY HARGREAVES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

With only his second full length feature, writer/director Saulnier has crafted a glorious, tragic, low-key and fascinating experience. Dwight (Blair) is living rough, sleeping in his Pontiac, dumpster-diving for food and breaking into houses to bathe. He dropped off the grid following the murder of his parents, but when a sympathetic police officer warns him that the offender is being released, he sets off on

a mission to get retribution. It's an act of violence that will change everything for him as he realises an eye for an eye isn't always as straight forward as it seems.

While most revenge thrillers follow the path of high octane action, Saulnier takes a slower, more pensive route and is all the more powerful for it. Which isn't to say there's not plenty of brutality and bloodshed. Indeed, the tone of the film

makes these scenes all the more shocking and disturbing. Dwight is a man whose life is ruined by the actions of others, but in trying to put right the injustice of releasing the man responsible, he opens up more danger for his estranged sister (Hargreaves) and her children. Inevitably his road to vengeance can only end one way, a fate to which he is resigned to. Despite having very little clue as to the world his enemies live in - firearms are prevalent while he himself has no experience with them - he is driven to become an amateur assassin by the feelings that have been brooding in the years spent isolated from civilisation. Other than his end goal, he hasn't thought the plan through; the whole time he seems in a constant state of bewilderment, thanks to Blair's brilliantly subtle yet emotive performance.

Blue Ruin also includes some stunning cinematography (by Saulnier himself) which makes the most of the remote area of Kansas, offsetting the tranquil, rural life against the violence of the residents. Tonally, it's in

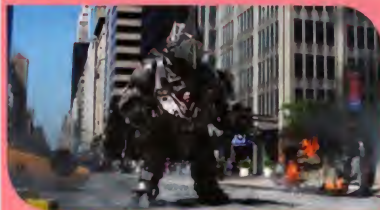
a similar vein to the Coen Brother's 1984 classic, Blood Simple, complete with elements of black humour along the way. It's bleak, dark, painful, and chock-full of tension; the perfect antidote to the gung-ho machismo revenge films normally display. This is a superb character study in which retribution is but a small element.

It's not going to fill the multiplexes, but Blue Ruin is compelling viewing and will stay with you longer after it's finished.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 9



## THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2

**DIRECTOR: MARC WEBB / SCREENPLAY: ALEX KURTZMAN, ROBERTO ORCI, JEFF PINKNER, JAMES VANDERBILT / STARRING: ANDREW GARFIELD, EMMA STONE, JAMIE FOXX, DANE DEHAAN, PAUL GIAMATTI, SALLY FIELD, CHRIS COOPER, MARTIN SHEEN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

One thing is abundantly clear from watching The Amazing Spider-Man 2 and its predecessor: Andrew Garfield owns the role. Whether cheekily renaming Jamie Foxx's aggrieved villain Electro as 'Sparkles' or saving a young kid from bullies in an alleyway, Garfield's charming performance as Peter Parker and his alter-ego has given the audience what could be the definitive Spider-Man.

But all is not well with the sequel. There are times when it verges on Spider-Man 3 messiness. Director Marc Webb has handled Spidey's personal torment and the rocky romance between Peter and Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone) in winning fashion, without a doubt, but for all the drama, adorable quirky beats and gigantic action set-pieces, the structure of the plotting and accompanying strands

is less impressive. And even for a comic book movie, the film is not without its absurdities. Gwen's eloquent and wise-beyond-her-years Valedictorian speech signposts the third act in unobtrusive fashion and her expensive-looking wardrobe clashes with her identity as a working class, daughter of a cop New Yorker. (How can she afford to be decked out in such quality garb?)

Electro, too, turns out to be a somewhat mediocre Big Bad. Max Dillon is a cross between Travis Bickle and Family Matters' Steve Urkel. He wants to show the world that he's important and special, but he's such a dork. Transformed into Electro, the character is allowed to shed his timid nerd persona and treat the NYC power grid like an all-you-can-eat buffet. Less a major villain in his own right, despite some gnarly powers, he's more the manipulated instrument of Harry Osborn (Dane DeHaan), a young man trying to stop a genetic mutation from consuming him. The rising star's portrayal of the rich kid and old pal of Parker's

is another of the film's few strong points. DeHaan has got the pretty boy looks of a Brad Pitt twinned with the wild energy of a Jack Nicholson. He's riveting to watch and graced with an edge of unpredictability.

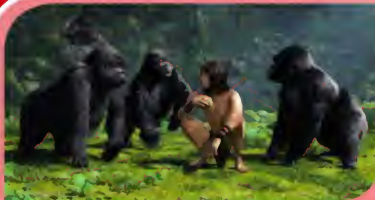
The Amazing Spider-Man 2 is bookended by scenes with Paul Giamatti's Rhino. These teasing sequences - along with the introduction of several characters that will go on to form The Sinister Six - highlight exactly what is wrong with the overall picture. The sequel is a bridge to a more expansive adventure but it's got to slog through - and tie up - loose ends left hanging from the rebooted origin story. The Amazing Spider-Man 2 finds itself both looking forward and looking back. Padded out to an unnecessary 141 minutes maybe - just maybe - the next film will provide the payoff anticipated, but not quite delivered, here.

MARTYN CONTERIO

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 6





## TARZAN 3D

**CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: REINHARD KLOOSS / SCREENPLAY: REINHARD KLOOSS, YONNI BRENNER, JESSICA POSTIGO / STARRING: KELLAN LUTZ, SPENCER LOCKE, JAIME RAY NEWMAN, ROBERT CAPRON, JOE CAPPELLETTI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Edgar Rice Burroughs' 1914 novel *Tarzan of the Apes* has left an everlasting legacy. Be it the pages of books, the airwaves of radio or (most notably) film, *Tarzan* (now quite sprightly for 100 years of age) has swung on many vines in his time. There have been over 60 films chronicling his adventures in the equatorial African jungle, from the early Elmer Lincoln silent films, to the Johnny Weissmuller movie series to Disney's popular 1999 animated

film *Tarzan* (which this new film will most likely be compared to). Sadly, this new motion-captured animated outing is one adaptation that mystifies more than it entertains.

When our loincloth-clad hero says, "Let's start at the beginning", he isn't kidding. Say what you will but we'd wager nobody expected a *Tarzan* film to open with a meteor in space and a dinosaur-populated Earth. It is from this early point that you realise you are in for

a very different adaptation; sadly it is not a very good one. Although we still get the "me *Tarzan*, you *Jane*" bit, this strange, German-made, 3D version of the epic adventure owes more to *Avatar* than it does Burroughs and not in a good way. The film sees wild man *Tarzan* (Lutz) meet *Jane* (Locke) and the two must fend off the mercenary forces of greedy Greystoke industries CEO William Clayton (Cappelletti) in a story revolving around an unobtainium-like unlimited energy source.

*Tarzan 3D* is an odd attempt at modernising this classic story and while there are a few sterling battles, this is mostly a rather misguided affair. The animation occasionally hits the right visual notes (the jungle and creatures are appealingly vibrant) but the motion-capture is more Mars Needs Moms than *Secret of the Unicorn*. The characters' faces rarely betray much feeling and when they do, they're scarily rodent-like (young *Tarzan* especially). Burroughs once wrote, "smiles are the foundation of beauty"; here it seems that *Tarzan* and

many other characters often have the emotional range of a potato, smiles or not. *Tarzan 3D* should be a thrill but the 3D is badly rendered and gives no real sense of depth and the actual animation itself is hugely flawed, much like the noble but utterly pointless attempts to update this story.

*Tarzan* and *Jane*'s chemistry is not as beautiful as it has been before and by going in with Disney's fondly remembered version fresh in memory, you really are in for disappointment. The environmental message and jungle-swinging action may entertain some kids and at just over 90 minutes, Klooss' film does not stay long enough to bore viewers completely rigid, but that's not enough to compete in today's competitive market. *Tarzan 3D* is a film that feels like an early experiment with some of its advanced computer technology and not like a 2014 animated picture. He bad *Tarzan*, it shame.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL ++++++ 4



## THE DIRTIES

**CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MATTHEW JOHNSON / SCREENPLAY: MATTHEW JOHNSON, EVAN MORGAN, JOSH BOLES, MATTHEW MILLER / STARRING: MATT JOHNSON, OWEN WILLIAMS / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 6TH**

The *Dirties* sees two heavily bullied high school movie buffs fantasising about shooting their tormentors (whom they nickname The *Dirties*) for a school project; however, for one of them the filter between fantasy and reality begins to dissolve. There is no doubt that this masterful film will divide audiences, in fact it will likely get labelled as shameful exploitation. The recent string of American shootings makes

this material highly controversial Stateside and universally contemporary worldwide. In this age of social media, bullying has been allowed to flourish and this unsettlingly palpable film will connect to many audiences' (and victims') emotions.

The scenes of bullying do not exaggerate – they are realistic, demeaning and nasty but it is the film's accurate depiction of the onlooking schoolmates that chills most.

Long before the inevitable climax, this is a pure horror, as these kids are persecuted merely for being themselves and their fellow classmates either join in or turn back to their mobiles. The *Dirties* is hardly the first film to tackle bullying; classics like *Carrie* and movies such as *Chronicle*, *Tormented* and *The Final* have all focused on the subject. Yet this is one that does not use the subject to fuel a slasher plot or a bloodfest, but to orchestrate a psychological thriller of sorts. Filmed and presented in found footage style (which ultimately is left bafflingly unresolved), the film has an uneasy closeness and the altering reality shifts create a rather disturbingly involving and delusional journey of dark wish-fulfilment for the character of Matt Johnson (all the characters in the film are alternate versions of the actual actors).

This film is a wake-up call for the educational system and as grandiose as it is to say, for society. The tragedy is that the film's social meaning may be lost amidst allegations of exploiting real-life tragedies and events. The *Dirties* is a very sharply written and devilishly

clever genre hybrid and deserves to be acknowledged as such. Thankfully, despite the doom and gloom of this review thus far, the film manages to work in some very funny dialogue and is littered with cinematic references that avid film fans will adore catching.

Never choosing to exploit the subject for splatter horror or a shootout thriller, this film focuses on the mindset of bullied individuals. Johnson's film is enthused with feeling and is perhaps the most psychologically apt film about bullying ever made. The *Dirties*, while smart and well acted and written, is a proclamation that says, until people stop demeaning and victimising others for being who they are, violence will only increase as will the amount of people swallowed by darkness. The *Dirties* is unexpectedly entertaining and even more unexpectedly urgent and compelling.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++ 9



## TRANSCENDENCE

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: WALLY PFISTER / SCREENPLAY: JACK PAGLAN / STARRING: JOHNNY DEPP, REBECCA HALL, CILLIAN MURPHY, KATE MARA, PAUL BETTANY, MORGAN FREEMAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Wally Pfister, Christopher Nolan's cinematographer of choice, steps out from behind... well, whatever it is cinematographers use, to claim his first feature film credit as director. But *Transcendence* is a troubling and rather ponderous movie which perhaps owes a little too much to Nolan and fatally fails to allow Pfister to really make his mark as a smart and dynamic original filmmaker. *Transcendence* is packed with brave ideas and solid, if unremarkable, performances but Pfister lacks the subtlety and wit needed to bring the project alive and the movie ends up looking like the work of someone who saw *Inception* a couple of time but didn't really get it.

But to be fair, as another summer of superheroes and monster movies looms large, *Transcendence* is, at least, something new, even if it trades in ideas and concepts which might seem old hat to the technologically savvy, dealing as it does with artificial intelligence, the internet, nanotechnology and pesky computer viruses. Johnny Depp, freed from the chains of Captain Jack Sparrow, plays AI expert Dr Will Caster, boss of a bunch of boffins striving to create a fully free-thinking sentient machine, an event which Will calls 'transcendence'. Not everyone thinks this is a terribly good idea. Will is shot by anti-AI terrorists and whilst he appears to recover from his injuries

the bullet he was shot with contained lethal radioactive material. Before he dies, Will, with the help of his wife Evelyn (Hall), uploads his consciousness into the computer allowing him to survive digitally. Despite the concerns of their chum Max (Bettany), Evelyn and Digi-Will proceed with their plans to connect Will to the Internet (God bless a decent broadband connection) and Will continues with his attempts to achieve 'transcendence' when Evelyn sets up a massive solar-powered research facility in a run-down desert town. Will creates a new super-advanced form of nanotechnology which has the capacity to alter the very essence of human nature.

Big, if slightly derivative ideas abound but the problem is that Pfister doesn't really know how to develop them in anything other than the most simplistic and ham-fisted manner. The film's tone sharp-turns from wagging a disapproving finger at the remorseless, unchecked advance of modern super-technology to gasping in awe at the miracles of science and the short-sightedness of those who stand in the way of progress. As a love story it verges on the creepy as Digi-Will romances an increasingly spaced-out Evelyn and a last-act volte-face to turn it into an action movie (there's been a lot of talking so far) just requires us to admire snazzy CGI and visual effects tricks Pfister

was probably keeping up his sleeve as Nolan was putting the finishing touches to *Inception*.

Perhaps it's inexperience that scuppers *Transcendence*; Pfister's cause isn't helped by first-time screenwriter Paglan's messy script which lacks pace and focus as much as it lacks humour and character. There's precious little light and shade in any of the characters or their dilemmas; the anti-AI terrorist group led by Kate Mara's Bree are as blank-page dull as Hall, Bettany and even Depp, reduced to leering omnipotently out from a computer screen for the better part of the movie. But Pfister makes it all look slick, sleek and stylish and even if the film's moral compass drifts alarmingly and the post-apocalyptic pay-off stretches credulity beyond breaking-point, *Transcendence* rarely looks less than the sum of its \$100 million budget. And whilst Wally makes a decent pfist of it (come on, we were never going to be able to resist that one), *Transcendence* is just a bit too ambitious for its own good and a bit too scattershot and undisciplined to mark him down as one to watch.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ++++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++++++ 5

# REVIEWS

STARBURST REVIEWS  
THE LATEST HOME  
VIDEO RELEASES



## MAGIC MAGIC

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: SEBASTIAN SILVA / STARRING: MICHAEL CERA, EMILY BROWNING, JUNO TEMPLE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Magic Magic: so good they had to name it twice? Not quite, but there is something strangely special about this psychological head trip into the mind of a seriously disturbed young woman. With hypnosis, herbal healing and paranoid delusions, all playing a part, there might not be any narrative tricks up its sleeve but Magic Magic still has a few nasty rabbits to pull out of its hat.

Juno Temple stars as Alicia; after arriving in Chile and meeting her cousin Sarah (Browning), Sarah's Chilean boyfriend Agustin and his oddball friend Brink (Cera), she starts to slowly unravel as sleepless nights and paranoia begin to take their toll. Alicia is a fragile soul in unfamiliar surroundings (she has never been out of America) who finds herself alone with strangers when Sarah is unexpectedly called back to school. Agustin seems nice but Michael Cera twists his usual innocent persona as strange sadist Brink. When Alicia and her companions travel to a secluded house cut off from civilisation, it gradually emerges that all is not well with Alicia.

The story is relatively simple and offers little in the way of surprises. Don't expect magic, all out horror or the supernatural. Though there are plenty of hints at a more mysterious plot, Magic Magic remains only a gripping character

study of paranoia and mental illness. Temple plays Alicia with a delicate vulnerability that is always on a knife-edge. She is unpredictable and terribly troubled and it is harrowing to watch her descend into madness.

Backing up her performance with edgy cinematography and uncomfortable sound design, director Sebastián De Silva puts you firmly in the mind of Alicia, forcing you to see the world as she does. It's a vital,

unsettling masterstroke that makes Alicia tragic and completely identifiable. The script adds a dash of intrigue by surrounding Alicia with far from perfect and downright destructive personalities. Michael Cera is wonderfully weird as Brink; it is never clear what this wacky, drunken mess is up to. He is a wild card who is occasionally as sinister as he is funny. Meanwhile, Browning's character has a secret of her own that she is keeping from Alicia.

At times, Magic Magic is genuinely chilling. Though the Chile setting looks inviting, with de Silva capturing some gorgeous scenery and stunning shots of the local wildlife, it's often filtered with a dark edge. The house is imposing, the mirrors glare back at Alicia and even the lovely local sheepdog becomes a persistent threat to her fragile state of mind. Early on, a car trip turns unbearable when an abandoned puppy becomes a soundtrack of despair. Later, it's the endless sound of birds that drives Alicia to depression. It is relentless, oppressive and exhausting.

Though it appears that it might have a trick or two in store for the climax, the film's slightly barney third act is rushed, strange and unsatisfying in its ultimate crushing inevitability. Michael Cera might add a couple of laughs into the bleakness but Magic Magic casts its real spell with a simply haunting portrayal of mental illness.

Extras: None

PETE TURNER

+++++ 6



STARBURST





## NINJA II – SHADOW OF A TEAR

DVD+BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: ISAAC FLORENTINE / SCREENPLAY: DAVID N. WHITE / STARRING: SCOTT ADKINS, KANE KOSUGI, MIKA HIJII, VITHAYA PANSRINGARM / RELEASED: OUT NOW

Following 2009's *Ninja*, this sequel sees Scott Adkins return as Casey Bowman. The plot of *Shadow of a Tear*, which is quickly established in the film's first 10 minutes, is that Casey returns home to find his pregnant wife Namiko (the returning Hiji) murdered. With only the barbed wire marks on Namiko's neck serving as any sort of clue as to who carried out this atrocity, Casey seeks the assistance of long-time

friend Nakabara (Kosugi) in his quest for revenge. And that is literally it in terms of plot for the most part, as the film quickly transitions into fight sequence after fight sequence.

The thing is, *Shadow of a Tear* is a great action movie, with Adkins showing off his skills in a multitude of innovative, supremely choreographed battles. As his character of Bowman

descends on his journey, there's literally not a soul that he doesn't roundhouse kick in the face. The story arc of the movie is almost an afterthought, as *Shadow of a Tear* slices through the bad guys with as much speed and accuracy as we've seen in many a year.

But whilst it's a belter of a martial arts-heavy action movie, one can't help but think that it may get lost in the shuffle of direct-to-DVD movies that are out there, especially given its themes. Maybe as much of a hindrance as it is a help, *Shadow of a Tear* feels like a film that would be very much at home in the 1980s. As impressive as its fight scenes clearly are, the movie may have landed in the wrong decade. You can't help but think if this was a film released in 1988 with Jean-Claude Van Damme in the lead then it would be quite the underground hit, much like *Bloodsport* or *Kickboxer*. In 2014, though, is there really a sizeable market for a movie like *Shadow of a Tear*? We firmly hope so.

Despite a plot devised

purely as an excuse to see lots of fists and feet meet lots of faces, this is as good a martial arts film as we've seen since 2003's *Ong-bak*. Many have championed the cause of Adkins as a modern day JCVD, and his mildly charismatic, clinically accurate turn as Casey Bowman does add further to these claims. Whether he can ever become a mainstream movie name in the way Norris, Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Lundgren or Van Damme did in previous decades remains to be seen, but he's certainly doing his best.

The maximum action makes the minimal plot of *Ninja – Shadow of a Tear* massively enjoyable for those of an action movie leaning, with a back-to-basics boatload of brutality loaded into the fists of Adkins, an actor who will hopefully get to head up similarly effective actioners in the future.

Extras: None

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++++ 7



## THEATRE OF BLOOD (1973)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DOUGLAS HICKOX / SCREENPLAY: ANTHONY GREVILLE-BELL / STARRING: VINCENT PRICE, DIANA RIGG, IAN HENDRY, HARRY ANDREWS, JACK HAWKINS, MICHAEL HORDEN, ARTHUR LOWE, ROBERT MORLEY, MILO D'SHEA, ERIC SYKES, ROBERT COOTE, DENNIS PRICE, CORAL BROWNE, JOAN HICKSON, MADELINE SMITH / RELEASED: MAY 19TH

By 1973, the golden age of British horror was coming to an end. Hammer, of course, was still just about knocking them out, but with *The Exorcist* (1973) and its ilk on the way, horror flicks were about to change. However, there was still one last moment of Gothic brilliance to come in the unlikely form of a "comedy horror". Always a problematic genre (seldom that funny but often just good natured enough to stop them from being scary) and remarkably similar to the Dr. Phibes movies of the previous

years; it wasn't even a Hammer, so how on Earth did *Theatre of Blood* end up being one of the best British horror movies of all time?

Vincent Price plays the supposedly dead Edward Lionheart, a Shakespearean actor who was never popular with the critics. Turns out he took all that criticism to heart (especially after he was denied a prestigious award) so has taken it upon himself to elaborately bump off the Critics' Circle responsible by

way of a series of brutal killings; the twist being that they're all inspired by murders from his Shakespearean repertoire. Be honest, with an idea as good as that you'd have to work pretty hard to turn out a duff film. In fact, it was such a delicious premise that producer Sam Jaffe managed to attract some fairly, shall we say, robust stars. Take a look at the top of this review and look at that cast list. Just look at it. [We're looking – Ed] Yep, that is for real. That isn't just a list of British movie institutions, that's the actual cast of *Theatre of Blood*. Blimey.

Price is in the finest fettle of his career and tackles a series of set pieces that allow him to combine his horror-ham persona perfectly with some genuinely high quality Shakespearean performances as he sadistically dispatches those legends. But cleverly, he even manages to camp some of those up as if to prove the critics right. This is Price as the embodiment of old-school horror giving two fingers to the new wave and reminding us all that horror could still be fun. His 'to be or not to be' speech has genuine pathos and it's hard to believe

it's in the same movie as the most memorable pie-related murder in the history of cinema (seriously, you won't forget that one). There are some predictable but fun one-liners but largely the comedy works because the horror is the comedy, even Michael J. Lewis's melodramatic score adds to the humour.

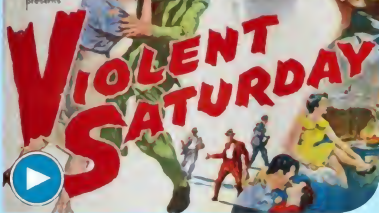
Shot entirely on location, this Blu-ray transfer is also so good you might even be able to tell us which one of Price's henchies is Stanley Bates. Yes, that is Bungle from *Rainbow*. We told you that cast was stellar.

Extras: Audio commentary with *The League of Gentlemen* / *Victoria Price* discusses *Theatre of Blood* / Interviews with David Del Valle, Madeleine Smith and Michael J. Lewis / Original Trailer / Reversible sleeve featuring original and newly commissioned artwork by Sam Smith / Collector's booklet / reproduction of original press book material, illustrated with original archive stills.

JOHN KNOTT

+++++++10

20th  
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## VIOLENT SATURDAY (1955)

DVD+BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: RICHARD FLEISCHER / SCREENPLAY: SYDNEY BOEHM / STARRING: VICTOR MATURE, RICHARD EGAN, STEPHEN MCNALLY, LEE MARVIN, ERNEST BORGNINE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fleischer's 1955 effort is a tangled web of wonder with a bank heist at its centre. Set in the small mining town of Bradenville, *Violent Saturday* is often played up as a heist movie, although there's a whole lot more going on. Just as important as the three criminals who turn up with the intention

of looting the town's only bank, there's a quiet clerk who spends his night as a peeping tom, there's an alcoholic in a troubled marriage, there's a prim and proper librarian who becomes a thief, there's an Amish father who's having to face up to the very real threat of violence, and there's a father who's looking to

reinstate his son's faith in him. All of these plot points intertwine to deliver a film that is quite the impressive piece of work.

Given that it's often cited by Quentin Tarantino as a direct influence on *Reservoir Dogs*, some may expect this to be full of blood, bad language and even badder attitudes. Remember, this film was made in 1955. There are most definitely some bad attitudes at play in this movie, but don't expect much in terms of gore and vulgarity, although the violence, when it comes, often catches you unaware. *Violent Saturday* is just as much a dramatic soap opera as it is a noir heist movie. With cutting dialogue and some wonderful performances holding it together, combined with some lavishly elegant camera work, it's often a joy to watch.

In terms of the better performances, Richard Egan's watch is one of the stars of the show, whilst Victor Mature as a father who has to give a reason to his young son as to why he didn't serve in the war is beautifully delivered with a warm hue that only films of a certain period seem capable of producing. Lee Marvin is at his menacing

best as one of the bank robbers, and Ernest Borgnine brings a calming presence as the head of an Amish family, complete with false beard. The rest of the performances generally tick all of the right boxes, although it's Egan and Mature who really grab the attention.

*Violent Saturday* is a sharp, rich movie that, whilst very much of its time, still has a lot to offer to new audiences. Part heist, part family drama, part soap opera, the film manages to wear many hats and juggle many plates, with generally pleasing results. There is a sense of a few loose ends by the movie's close, but none that really alter the overall picture.

When all is said and done, *Violent Saturday* is a very deliberate, well-constructed movie that was ahead of its time in many ways, with its influence clearly visible in many later efforts across many genres.

Extras: 32-page booklet / Interview with William Friedkin / Interview with Nicolas Saada

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 8



## I DECLARE WAR

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JASON LAPEYRE, ROBERT WILSON / SCREENPLAY: JASON LAPEYRE / STARRING: SIAM HU, KOLTON STEWART, GAGE MUNROE / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 9TH

Who doesn't wish they could still spend their days playing guns in the woods on long hot summer days with their buddies? *I Declare War* takes you back to childhood, mixing the reality of sticks, stones and name-calling with the fantasy of real guns, real explosions and real war. With red liquid-filled balloons at the ready, when these kids clash there will most definitely be blood. But as tempers fray, insecurities rise and jealousy boils, will the wounds be real or fake?

A group of 12-year old

friends play 'Capture the Flag' in the woods, armed only with sticks, balloons and a simple set of rules to adhere to. Their imaginations fill in the blanks and *I Declare War* treats their rivalry as reality with real risk injected by the presence of genuine guns in their hands instead of the twigs they actually hold. P.K. (Munroe) leads one group with knowledge of generals from Patton to Napoleon ingrained in his brain. On the opposing team are leader Quinn (Aidan Gouveia), mutinous

Skinner (Michael Friend) and the only girl of the group; Jess (Mackenzie Munro).

*I Declare War* has everything a good war movie should. There is friendship, rivalry, conflict, heartbreak, strategy and sacrifice. In the minds of these kids, the war, the weapons and the stakes are as real as the emotions they feel while playing them. It's like *Lord of the Flies* but the kids can just go home anytime or *The Hunger Games* without the very real threat of death. *Call of Duty* has nothing on the power of their imaginations.

Some take it far more seriously than others; P.K. is a little boy on a big power trip and Skinner is letting resentment and insecurity affect his ability to play by the rules. Meanwhile when Jess wants a juice break, she simply stops playing and takes a juice break.

From P.K. to Paul to Skinner and Jess, the characters are neatly drawn but the script never reaches out to make any bigger or bolder statements about the games they play. The performances and script make the boys and girls come to life with as much verve as their vivid

daydreams but at the end of the day, *I Declare War* is forever just child's play.

There are moments where the threat of real violence rears its ugly head and as a result there is some tension as the war builds through minor skirmishes to bigger battles and finally a showdown. However *I Declare War* is really all about immersion in imagination. From the opening sounds of helicopters and gun shots to the laser gun eyes of one boy, these kids rarely step out of the world they create in their heads. Their emotions may be real but the violence and the threat rarely is. Co-directors Jason Lapeyre and Robert Wilson excel at blending fantasy and reality but stop short of making these kids' games mean anything. Like playing war in the woods then, watching *I Declare War* is mostly harmless fun; at times tense and exciting but most importantly far more enjoyable than sitting at home playing a video game.

Extras: None

PETE TURNER

+++++ 6



## SON OF BATMAN

**BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ETHAN SPAULDING / SCREENPLAY: JOE LANSDALE / STARRING: JASON O'MARA, STUART ALLAN, MORENA BACCARIN, THOMAS GIBSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Yes, as the title suggests, this latest animated fare brings audiences an introduction to Damian Wayne (Allan). The lovechild of Bruce Wayne (O'Mara) and Talia al Ghul (Baccarin), this creation of Grant Morrison's often split the comic book community. No longer with us in that medium, the expertly trained, slightly psychopathic pre-teen is now getting the small screen treatment.

When Ra's al Ghul (Esposito) and his League

of Shadows are attacked by Deathstroke (Gibson) and his cohorts, Talia makes the decision to send son Damian to Gotham City to be introduced to his father, the Caped Crusader. With Batman unaware that he even has a son at this point, the Dark Knight's world is flipped on its head. Not only does Bruce Wayne now have a child, said sprog just so happens to have been trained by the League of Shadows from birth. With a penchant for

revenge and death, much like grandfather Ra's, the young Damian is fully prepared to take the life of any who have wronged him – in this case Deathstroke, et al – and it is down to the World's Greatest Detective to instill a sense of morality and a willingness to do the right thing into his newly discovered offspring. Tangled up in all of this, we also have a subplot involving Kirk Langstrom (Xander Berkeley) and an army of Man-Bats, plus fleeting appearances from Dick Grayson (Sean Maher), aka Nightwing, and a few familiar faces.

For long-time fans of DC's animated features, it's still surprising to not hear Kevin Conroy's dulcet tones as the Dark Knight. This isn't helped by the fact that Jason O'Mara's voice just seems so un-Batman; it lacks the maturity, grit and integrity a Batman should convey. And herein lies one of the biggest problems of *Son of Batman*: the voice casting and the characterisations of certain folk. O'Mara's Batman simply lacks any sort of gravitas, whilst Gibson's Deathstroke is taken from being one of the

world's prime killers to being a whining, pathetic shell of an assassin. The al Ghul's are fine for what they are needed for, whereas young Stuart Allan does well as the pompous, immature Damian, and David McCallum's Alfred is perfectly played, stealing all of the film's best lines.

Impressive anime-lite action is brought to life with a score that's a poor imitation of a Hans Zimmer effort, and some of the film's bigger sequences, such as the opening attack on the League of Shadows, are ridiculous even by comic book logic. *Son of Batman* just ends up feeling like a massive case of style over substance, a movie mishandled in so many ways. Given how mediocre Justice League War was, we were hoping for a return to form here. Sadly, that's not the case.

**Extras:** Four featurettes / Sneak peak at *Batman – Assault on Arkham* / Four bonus cartoon episodes

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++++ 5



## THE EALING STUDIOS COLLECTION VOL 1

**DVD / CERT: U / STARRING: ALEC GUINNESS, DENNIS PRICE, JOAN GREENWOOD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

This gem of a Blu-ray box set gathers together three of the very finest Ealing comedies – *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) and *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949). They're films that need no introduction, but hell, let's introduce them anyway.

From a STARBURST reader's point of view, perhaps the most interesting is *The Man in the White Suit*. Cinema historians tend not to write about it as such, but what is it if not an early British sci-fi movie? Set in the industrial North, this acidly

witty "what if" tale is about what happens when an obsessive chemist invents a form of textile so strong you have to cut it with a blow torch. Answer: he has to reckon with powerful vested interests in the shape of repressive mill owners and bolshevik labour forces.

Graced with a perfectly turned script by T.E.B. "Tibby" Clarke, *The Lavender Hill Mob* is a heist caper wherein a meek caper clerk dreams up a scheme to steal gold bullion from the Bank of England; it's Ealing at its most whimsical and

charming. Best of all, though, is Robert Hamer's masterpiece, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. The darkest and most brilliant of Ealing's creations, this is a comedy of revenge in which a family of prideful toffs, the D'Ascoynes (all played by Alec Guinness), are picked off by a jilted relation (the underrated Dennis Price). It's one of those rare films that you just know is going to last and last.

The HD transfers are all immaculate, with scarcely a blemish. *The Lavender Hill Mob* is especially sharp and clean. *The Man in the White Suit* is just a touch grainier but again very nice, with both the grit and delicate fantasy of Alexander Mackendrick's direction emerging more forcefully than ever before. But it's undoubtedly *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, with its thickly encrusted Gothic décor and dazzling costumes, that benefits most from the shift to Blu-ray. You can now count every feather and flower in the extraordinary confections that Joan Greenwood wears on her head, and you can see a subtle watery reflection bouncing off Dennis Price's face as, submerged up to his neck in

the Thames, he sends Ascoyne D'Ascoyne tumbling fatally over a weir.

Each of the films comes with welcome extras. There's a vintage 25-minute interview with T.E.B. Clarke in which he paints an idyllic picture of what it was like to work at Ealing. The rather sad career of Dennis Price is covered in an elderly but thorough documentary. A brisk, more recent 13-minute featurette looks at the background and themes of *The Man in the White Suit*. Ten stars seems inadequate. How about three cheers and a V for Victory sign?

**Extras:** Introductions by Martin Scorsese and John Landis / *Dennis Price – Those British Faces / Alternative American Ending / Restoration comparisons / Audio interview with director Charles Crichton / Audio commentary / Mavis interviews T.E.B. Clarke / Revisiting *The Man in the White Suit* / Stills gallery*

JULIAN WHITE

+++++++ 10





## ORCA - THE KILLER WHALE (1977)

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: MICHAEL ANDERSON / SCREENPLAY: LUCIANO VINCENZONI, SERGIO DONATI / STARRING: RICHARD HARRIS, CHARLOTTE RAMPLING, BO DEREK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

From a time long before sharktopuses swam the oceans comes this brooding, big budget, Dino De Laurentiis-produced cash-in on the Jaws bandwagon. Richard Harris plays Nolan, a thick-skulled fisherman who hatches a foolhardy get-rich-quick scheme to catch a killer whale and sell it to a sea life aquarium by shooting it with a

harpoon. (You might think that any self-respecting aquarium would prefer its creatures not to be full of holes that would let the water in, but never mind.) Unsurprisingly, the plan goes badly awry. He fatally mutilates a pregnant female orca, and her big, ferocious hubby is not happy. Nolan is instantly consumed with remorse, but by then it's too late: the rancorous

cetacean is after blood, and there's no way to avoid a showdown with it... err, apart from, you know, by keeping away from the water.

To be fair, the script does a good job of handling the tricky issue of why Nolan doesn't just stay safely on land far away from the six tonne vigilante. Following him back to port, the whale busts up boats and causes all kinds of mayhem, tormenting the fishing village that Nolan calls home, with the result that the irked villagers pressure him into going back to sea to face the monster he has created. But you're also asked to swallow some decidedly far-fetched moments, as when the whale (they're highly intelligent, you know) cooks up a plan to blow up the oil refinery on the hill by starting a fire in the docks, all with a few pokes of its nose to wobbly timbers.

Still, the widescreen location cinematography of the Newfoundland coastline is breathtaking, the SFX stand up well, and the footage of killer whales is plentiful (filming them seems to have been much easier than filming great whites, real or mechanical). And

there's Richard Harris. If you've only ever seen him warbling faintly from beneath Professor Dumbledore's headmasterly regalia in the first couple of Harry Potter films, then you're in for quite a shock. Flapping about manically and glowering from under the hood of his duffel coat, what he does isn't exactly acting the way we know it today, but there's never a dull moment, and in the end he's quite touching as the doomed and bewildered sea dog.

Throw in a florid Ennio Morricone score, and the whole thing is weirdly impressive in a histrionic, overblown way, if only because, in these days of cheap and cheerful Syfy channel monster flicks, it makes a refreshing change to come across one that's very expensive and very gloomy. Like so many of De Laurentiis's films, Orca now seems like a bit of a Dino-saur, but it's still fun and worth having in your sights.

Extras: None

JULIAN WHITE

+++++ 6



## WILLOW CREEK

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BOBCAT GOLDTHWAIT / STARRING: BRYCE JOHNSON, ALEXIE GILMORE / RELEASE DATE: MAY 26TH

Bobcat Goldthwait has proved himself to be quite the darkly humorous filmmaker over the years. This time out, the writer/director tackles the subject of Bigfoot. Deciding to go the oft-derided found-footage route, Willow Creek centres on a couple who decide to try and track down the elusive Sasquatch. Hoping to prove the existence of this long-disputed legend is Jim (Johnson),

accompanied by his far more sceptical partner, Kelly (Gilmore). Along their journey, the duo take in Bigfoot tourism spots, local believers, and typical "go back to where you came from" types, amongst others. But will Jim and Kelly actually see the legend that they so seek?

Willow Creek is definitely one of the better found-footage features of recent years. The story takes its time

to unravel, and the constant focus on the central couple only adds to the attachment that the audience has to said pair. Throughout Willow Creek's journey, we see Jim and Kelly go through a vast array of emotions: from playful partners, to unwelcome visitors, to a scurrying, scared duo who are completely uncomfortable with the situation that they find themselves in. And all the while, you get to enjoy two wonderfully natural performances from Johnson and Gilmore.

Yes, we don't blame you for shrugging at the first mention of yet another found footage movie. But trust us, this is one of the better ones. Much like the recent *The Borderlands*, Willow Creek restores credibility to an ailing subgenre. Goldthwait crafts a warmly charismatic tale that just so happens to feature a presence that is utterly terrifying for the couple who have gone out to find Bigfoot.

Whereas so many found footage movies rely on shock scares and slapping you firmly in the face with their monsters, Willow Creek chooses to take a subtle approach.

You have to wait for a good 50 minutes or so for the movie to really step into the "creature" territory, but this opening 50 minutes never feels wasted, flat or stagnant. What we have is a basic story of a caring couple who put themselves out in the elements to see what they find. And then there is the question of just what it is that they do find. As Willow Creek comes to an end, you'll find yourself with a few questions that are created by a finale that is definitely open to interpretation.

If you go into this expecting a balls-to-the-wall, in-your-face found-footage horror, you'll be disappointed. Whilst not quite hitting the heights of *The Borderlands*, Willow Creek is a well-crafted, slow-burning horror that uses the found footage approach to deliver a movie that is just as much about what you don't see as what you do. A found footage movie as it should be done.

Extras: None

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 7



## MOSHI MONSTERS: THE MOVIE

**DVD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR: WIP VERNHOOL, MORGAN FRANCIS / SCREENPLAY: STEVE CLEVERLEY, JOCELYN STEVENSON / STARRING: PHILLIPA ALEXANDER, STEVE CLEVERLEY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

Following a Raiders-esque opening, during which Buster Bumblehops manages to infiltrate an ancient temple in order to get his white fluffy mitts on the 'Great Moshling Egg', the insidious Doctor Strangelove renews his plans to take over the world. Standing in his way are a menagerie of Moshis including Furi, Luvli, Diavlo, Zommer, Poppet and wannabe gooperstar Katsuma who will do their best to save the day (as long as Blinkie shoots them at all the right angles). Adorable adventures ensue, along with song, dance and a fair amount of kerfuffle.

If you have no idea what any of this means, then the chances

are you won't have a child under the age of 8.

To those who are blessed with these diminutive consumer vacuums, there's a good possibility that Moshi Monsters will have graced your consciousness at some point or other. Beginning life as a groundbreaking website where kids could create cute (or occasionally gross) mini monster avatars to socialise with friends old and new online, the Moshi phenomenon soon grew exponentially. In no time at all, shops (and homes) were flooded with collectable mini figures, magazines, books, CDs and music videos. The only thing missing was a TV series

or a movie. Until now.

It goes without saying that kids who love Moshi will love Moshi Monsters: The Movie. Why wouldn't they? It is the culmination of the franchise's escalation, taking everything that the children love about the medium and cramming it into 81 minutes of vibrant multi-colour fun. The streets of Monstro City are there, the shop owners they know so well from the online virtual world are in evidence and just about every Moshi that exists is seen somewhere in frame. There's adventure, humour, danger and even morals! So why do the end credits leave the adult viewer cold?

It's no surprise that parents are made to sit through a large degree of tush during their time, but for the most part creators of children's films know that pleasing the adult who is paying for the viewing experience is almost as important as keeping the kids glued to the screen. After all, they're the ones who will ultimately decide whether to cough up to watch it again. And that's where this Moshi movie falls slightly flat.

There is very little here

for anyone old enough to vote to enjoy. Yes, there are the monster puns (Scare Force One, Jollywood, Mount Sillymanjaro etc) but while Katsuma and his pals join the dots from A to B in textbook style, save for sitting and watching the wonderment in the eyes of your child, there's not much to enjoy. Sure, this was never going to be a film that adults would choose to watch alone, but cinematic history is peppered with kids films that embraced adult humour (The LEGO Movie being an outstanding – see we didn't say 'awesome' – example). Sadly, this just isn't one of them.

After watching it, my son gave this a nine out of ten. Yet I don't think that's a fair representation of the overall family experience, so his score slips a couple of places in my view. Moshi Monsters: The Movie does what it says on the shiny collectors tin, but it could have tried harder and been a little bit more.

Extras: None

GRANT KEMPSTER

+++++++ 7



## THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1989)

**DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DWIGHT H. LITTLE / SCREENPLAY: DUKE SANDEFUR / STARRING: ROBERT ENGLUND, JILL SCHEOLEN, ALEX HYDE-WHITE, BILL NIGHY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW**

The oft-filmed Gaston Leroux novel, tarnished by the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, gets a full-blooded makeover thanks to this forgotten late '80s version.

In a deviation from the original story, Erik Destler (Englund) is a composer, so obsessed with having his work heard forever that he strikes a deal with the Devil. Unfortunately, the price for this pact is he is

horribly mutilated, forcing him to live in the shadows, deep under a Victorian London opera house. He becomes infatuated with a young understudy, Christine (Schoelen), tutoring her (unseen through a dressing room mirror) and doing everything he can for her to land the lead role in the latest production of Faust. Be this killing off the leading lady, critics, stage hands or anyone

else who gets in the way.

Despite lapsing into slasher territory at times, this is actually a rather sincere re-tread of the classic text. Sure, some elements have been changed and there are few 'Freddy-esque' quips from Englund early on, but for the most part it works well. Erik's scarred face is often hidden under layers of grafted human skin, a procedure he does himself in sickening close-up. Wearing this skin-mask he almost resembles a psychotic Barry Manilow, but don't worry, that's not the only horror to be found here. The murders are suitably gory, albeit very brief. The film is bookended in modern-day New York, when aspiring singer Christine discovers the ragged pages of Erik's score, before being knocked unconscious by a falling sandbag at an audition. We can assume what follows is a dream of sorts, but the transition is not too jarring, even taking into account some dodgy English accents (they must be easier than trying to do French, as the original story

takes place in Paris).

Accents aside, the acting's solid, and it's lavishly directed by Little (who recently helmed an episode of *From Dusk Till Dawn: The Series*), providing adequate tension and some creepy atmosphere in the dank sewers and underground labyrinth of Erik's home.

This newly-released Blu-ray looks fine, if not spectacular, but certainly better than all previous formats, but is a bare-bones disc.

Extras: None

MARTIN UNSWORTH

+++++++ 8





## THE INVOKING

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JEREMY BERG / SCREENPLAY: JEREMY BERG, JOHN PORTANOVA, MATT MEDISCH / STARRING: TRIN MILLER, BRANDON ANTHONY, ANDY NORRIS, D'ANGELO MIDILI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

What do you call a horror film which isn't a horror film? Answer: *The Invoking*. Maybe not the best joke you've heard this year but then *The Invoking* really is nothing to laugh about. Unfortunately it's also nothing to get scared about, which is a bit of a problem when your audience are expecting something which might at least be trying to tingle the spine a little. But here's where nervy PR and a shaky faith in your own

product backfires: retitled from the original *Sader Ridge* into the much more lurid *The Invoking*, this is actually a decent and watchable psychological thriller which has been sold down the river by being falsely marketed as a horror movie. The DVD's detailed 'making of' feature (which is actually more watchable than the movie itself) reveals that the movie's budget was so tiny that it wasn't possible to even plan, much

less realise, any of the expected jump-shocks and scares of the traditional horror movie. Quite why everyone is so keen to label the film a horror movie when it really isn't is anyone's guess...

Still, *The Invoking* isn't big or clever enough for it to really matter all that much. What it lacks in horror and gore it makes up for with a fairly neat idea, an atmospheric and suitably remote location (the producer's childhood home) and some enthusiastic and gutsy performances. Sam Harris (Miller) inherits some real estate (including, if you will, the proverbial 'cabin in the woods') and sets off with some friends to check out her new acquisition. Creepy groundskeeper Eddie (Midili) tells Sam that she and her family spent time at the property when she was young but she can remember nothing of it. Or can she? She hears whispered voices, disembodied praying, experiences violent waking nightmares. It seems that the house is exhuming memories best left buried and as Sam becomes increasingly paranoid, none of her friends are safe...

There are no monsters or

mutants here, no creatures from the subconscious, no escaped psychopathic lunatics – just a young girl whose long-repressed memories of family abuse and brutality are bubbling to the surface and tipping her over the edge of sanity and into psychosis. It's an interesting idea and a decent character study, it intriguingly substitutes expected stalk-and-slash clichés with moments of tension and mounting dread and a real sense that something is not right here even if the story fails to unfold in the way we might expect from having seen far too many movies featuring isolated teenagers stranded in the middle of nowhere. *The Invoking* is a worthwhile, if flawed, attempt to do something a bit different but it's been done no favours by its distributors' desperate attempt to pigeonhole it as something it very clearly isn't and was never really intended to be.

**Extras:** Commentaries / 'Making of' feature / Galleries

PAUL MOUNT

+++++ 5



## TOURIST TRAP (1979)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: DAVID SCHMOELLER / SCREENPLAY: DAVID SCHMOELLER, J. LARRY CARROL / STARRING: CHUCK CONNORS, JOCELYN JONES, JON VAN NESS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Since its release in 1979, this film has garnered a small but devoted cult following, with none other than Stephen King himself as number one fan, and it's easy to see why. For starters, there's the glorious unlikelihood of the casting, which sees granite-jawed Western legend Chuck Connors (*The Big Country*) and Bond girl Tanya Roberts

gathered together under one rickety roof.

Then there's the storyline. Admittedly, this might, at first glance, seem a little humdrum. When a group of kids on a road trip suffer a puzzling mechanical failure, kindly old Mr Slausen (Connors) is on hand to invite them back to his dusty roadside museum in a right neighbourly

fashion. But before he can break out the Dr Pepper, their numbers are being thinned by a mysterious villain who wants to turn them into waxworks. Well, now that you mention it, Mr Slausen does happen to have a crazy brother – maybe he's got something to do with it... So far, so ordinary. But this is to reckon without the aforementioned villain, who has to rank as one of the most bizarre in what was a very good decade for cinematic monsters. Massive, masked, but also nattily suited and elaborately coiffed, with a sideline in cross-dressing, he's like a camp, Liberace-ish version of Leatherface. Like Leatherface, he's superhumanly strong, but he also has telekinetic powers which he uses to control (and have long, whimsical tea parties with) the waxworks he creates.

Although delivering a relatively restrained movie by the standards of co-producer Charles Band (no nudity, little explicit gore), director David Schmoeller makes the most of this weird baddie's constantly jarring presence to create a sense of mounting insanity. The mannequins, some with

glowing eyes, some with clacking jaws, are very creepy too. Kudos to the filmmakers, also, for casting Jocelyn Jones, a very good actress but not conventionally pretty, in a key role as one of the longer-lived of the hapless road trippers. Chuck Connors – always a very endearing character throughout his long career – gets plenty of screentime and gives a tour de force performance. As for Tanya Roberts, she trots around gracefully in a tube top and cut off jeans which look spray-painted on, and that's about all there is to be said about her.

True, *Tourist Trap* is rather rough around the edges, and the plot has a bad habit of tying itself – or rather its young cast – in near inextricable knots. But it's engaging, unexpected and memorable. This is risky, seat-of-the-pants filmmaking the way they used to do it back in the Seventies, and you'd be a dummy to miss it.

**Extras:** None

JULIAN WHITE

+++++ 7





## ICE SOLDIERS

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: STURLA GUNNARSSON / SCREEPLAY: JONATHAN TAYLOR / STARRING: DOMINIC PURCELL, MICHAEL IRONSIDE, ADAM BEACH, GABRIEL HOGAN, CAMILLE SULLIVAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The almost unavoidable problem facing any SF/horror movie which is set in the Antarctic/Arctic is that it's never going to be able to escape comparison with The Thing (or The Thing From Another World or even, troublingly, that pointless prequel/remake from a couple of years ago). But Ice

Soldiers just shrugs its shoulders, says 'yeah, so what?' and goes its own sweet snowy way. Although it has scarcely a single original bone in its ninety-minute body, Ice Soldiers is big, brash fun, an unashamed breezy B-Movie with absolutely no delusions of grandeur and with a simple aim to entertain.

In the Canadian Arctic in 1962 a trio of genetically engineered Cold War-era Russian super soldiers are awoken from a long, frozen sleep and set about slaughtering the scientists in the expedition team which has roused them. Fifty years later and another team arrives in the snowy wastes; Dr Andrew Malraux (Prison Break's square-jawed Dominic Purcell) wants to track down the legendary long-lost soldiers and Jane Frazer (Sullivan) is surveying the region for a dodgy oil company. Jane and Andrew flirt briefly but Andrew is about as responsive as a block of ice. "I was told you were nearly fifty," says Jane to Andy at one point, an odd line of dialogue whose meaning becomes apparent right at the end of the movie...

Before long the refrozen soldiers (basically just great hulking blond Aryan hunks) are rediscovered and reawakened. They wipe out the entire team bar Andrew, who sets off alone to track them down and destroy them before they can carry out a long-planned terrorist attack on New

York. Ice Soldiers suddenly veers off in a new direction and develops a new dynamic as Andrew meets up with tough trapper T.C. Cardinal (Beach) and together the pair close in on the ruthless, indestructible soldiers...

Snappy, unpretentious and beautifully filmed – director Gunnarsson knows exactly how to exploit the cold majesty of his locations – Ice Soldiers is undemanding thriller filler boasting surprisingly decent production values, sprightly action sequences and an oddly clumsy leading man in Steven Seagal-lookalike Purcell. It's a snowbound sci-fi snack guaranteed to evoke a flurry of interest even if the frequent talky bits might cause your attention to drift a bit, especially if you're watching it during a meal, possibly avalanche [You have got to be joking! - Ed].

Extras: None

PAUL MOUNT

+++++ 6



## SCOPERS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: EVAN OPPENHEIMER / STARRING: NICK STAHL, MIA MAESTRO, TARYN MANNING, BLAIR BROWN, WALLACE SHAWN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Released in the US with the more sci-fi title of The Speed of Thought, Scopers is the fourth feature from indie writer/director Evan Oppenheimer.

Scopers are people born with the capability to read minds, an ability which comes with the side effect of developing a neurological disorder by their 30th birthday that first renders them insane and then leaves them comatose. Having just turned 28, Joshua Lazarus knows his time is short, so spends it drinking and womanising, while government

agencies hire his ability for shady and highly illegal suspect-monitoring. However, when he encounters the beautiful and enigmatic Anna he realises life might hold a bit more for him, including survival.

This is not the kind of film you might think it is. The premise invokes suggestions of espionage, psychic wars and doomed lovers, but it's a far more subtle piece of filmmaking than that. While the telepathy is (obviously) an important aspect of the story, the focus is on the characters rather than their

abilities, much as the comic book themes of Oppenheimer's previous film Justice didn't dominate proceedings. Just as in his other works, black comedy The Auteur Theory and romantic comedy Alchemy, it's always human interaction that interests him the most.

Joshua's growing relationship with Anna forms the bulk of proceedings, and since she's unaware of the scope of her abilities, she acts as a convenient audience surrogate as they are explained to her. Mind reading is shown via CGI (the quality of which is only slightly above that of '90s RPG gameshow Nightmare) of abstract rooms where spoken thoughts are overheard or two scopers converse telepathically. The latter can also lead to merging, in which each scoper opens their mind to the other and thus knows everything about them, which is implied to have a greater intimacy than sex.

Any story that deals with comic book-style superpowers needs to have rules in order to properly function, like the super-strength and invincibility of Unbreakable, the teleportation of Jumper and the flight and

telekinesis of Chronicle rather than, say, the myriad of intriguing but inconsistent powers in Push. While the functionality of the telepathy is straightforward, its potential and limits are never properly explored, leaving the manner of its development somewhat ill-defined.

The real problem with the film is that it seems unsure of what kind of story it's trying to tell, with much of the first hour mostly involving scene setting and establishing the abilities of the scopers. The actual government work they are hired for is barely seen, leaving questions of morality to be raised rather late in the day, and while final revelations can be predicted, no tangible clues foreshadow them.

Part thriller, part romance, part pseudo-comic book movie, Scopers is a distinct, if slightly muddled experience that makes an effort to do something different but only partially succeeds.

Extras: None

ANDREW MARSHALL

+++++ 7



The biggest news this month is that Austin, Texas' Mondo will be releasing a vinyl pressing of John Williams' score to the Steven Spielberg classic, *Jurassic Park*. After teasing the release via Instagram in February, the label officially announced the impending release, which is June 11th. It will be a double LP with variant covers: on 180-gram amber-coloured vinyl (looking like something in which you might find a fossilized mosquito), with art by Dan McCarthy, limited to 1,000 copies. It will also be available on 180-gram black vinyl with art by JC Richard. The Richard version has the standard Mondo randomly-inserted variant, on 180-gram 'Dilophosaurus' vinyl (which is, essentially, a tan and red splatter).

Mondo also released information on their next release, via Brian Satterwhite's Film Score Focus radio show on Austin's classical station, KFMA. Sometime this month, the label will be issuing the soundtrack to the entirely strange 1979 Giulio Paradisi sci-fi film, *The Visitor*. The score, by Franco Micalizzi, will be released via Mondo, but no other details were available at press time. Digitmovies released a limited edition CD back in 2011, but the soundtrack (also known by the film's Italian title, *Stridulum*) has been unavailable on vinyl since its original release in 1979.

Also on the way is the third installment of German label Private Records' *Let's Go*

*Into Space* compilation series, which will feature some really rare psychedelic disco tracks from around the world – for instance, a rare version of Ozo's *Nite of The Black Mamba*, which was only released in Nigeria in 1980. Private's an interesting label, so we took this upcoming release as good reason to speak with the label's Janis Nowacki.

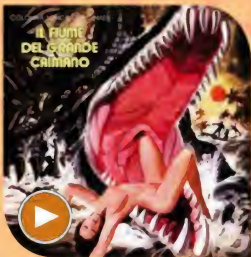
Private has a very specific niche, "reissues of electronic and cosmic music from the 1970s and early 1980s," so we started by asking Nowacki what led him to that particular genre.

"I collected scarce vintage music with a cosmic theme already for some years. But there was one legendary record most collectors including me and my friends never managed to find: the space funk soundtrack of the anime series *Captain Future* by Christian Bruhn", explains Nowacki. "The original record was only available for a very short time in Bavaria during the 1980s. The funny thing is – even Christian Bruhn didn't know it existed. With some effort and luck, I made it to license the music from a German film music publisher. It simply seemed to be easier to license the soundtrack than to find an original record. I decided to release the album as a private pressing and thought Private Records would be the perfect label name. The release was sold out very fast and people requested more cosmic music and the rest of it is history."

Similar fascinating stories of detective

work are scattered throughout Private Records' short history.

"My favorite story is how I found the producer/writer of the lovely Italian 7-inch private pressing [from] Loris And The Electronic Five – Black Star from the 1970s. After every attempt to try to find him led into the nowhere, I took one last look at the sleeve and just wanted to put it back into a box of records, where it certainly would have been stored away forever," Nowacki relates. "Then I recognised that the person on the cover who seemed to be the producer wears a typical martial arts robe. I'm also into Asian sports and decided to give it a last try and to contact the Italian umbrella association to check if he's a





member, and it turned out to be a direct hit. They forwarded the email and some days after that the deal was made."

In addition to the third *Let's Go into Space*, Private will soon be releasing the Stelvio Cipriani soundtrack for Sergio Martino's 1979 movie, *Il Fiume Del Grande Caimano*, also known as *The Great Alligator*. You can find information about this and all of Private's releases through their Facebook page.

Now we've made it past the madness of last month's Record Store Day, we can talk about what news came out of it. Death Waltz Recording Co.'s RSD releases all featured an obi strip with a list of upcoming releases. In addition to the already-announced *Twin Peaks* soundtrack, it's official that they'll be putting out Fabio Frizzi's score for *The Beyond* (which saw release as the second-ever offering from Mondo back in 2012), as well as the music to Ti West's excellent *House of the Devil*, by Jeff Grace and the Haim Frank Ilfman score for the Israeli revenge film *Big Bad Wolves*.

While not an RSD announcement, the page for Death Waltz's deluxe subscription service teased the fact that one of their other upcoming titles will finally be the long-teased, long-awaited soundtrack to *Beyond the Black Rainbow* by Sinioia Caves, which has never seen a release in any official form. Additionally, the label added a second option for subscribing. If you don't want all the bells and whistles (booklets, posters, colored vinyl, et al), you can now get a 'back to black' edition for a full £100 less, making it a very reasonable £75 for six LPs.

Death Waltz's release of *Slumber Party Massacre* is out now. The absolutely dirty synth score by Ralph Jones to this driller-killer of a flick is available on both split neon pink and green vinyl, as well as clear. Like an even more minimalist version of the Susan Justin score for *Forbidden World* crossed with some macabre cathedral organist, this is an excellent piece of uncomfortable weirdness that deserves

to be on your turntable, fan of slasher movies or not.

While Music On Vinyl's Record Store Day exclusive blue vinyl 7-inch single for Max Steiner's *King Kong* theme is long-since sold out, there's still an upcoming MOV release that will appeal to genre fans. Last month, the label put out a double LP collection of Ennio Morricone's works entitled simply, *Collected*, on 180-gram vinyl. It's a chronological journey through the maestro's work, starting with his theme for Luciano Salce's *The Fascist*, and traveling through his work for Sergio Leone, ending in modern day with *Ancora Qui*, which he composed for Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*. While obviously not as complete or thorough as 1995's double CD anthology *A Fistful of Film Music*, this is as nice a collection as you're likely to find on vinyl.

Also on the spaghetti western front, Sonor Music Editions has released *Lo Chiamavano Trinità (They Call Me Trinity)*, with its Franco Micalizi score, in a limited edition of 500 copies on 180-gram vinyl. In addition to being improved from the original 1970 stereo tapes, this version features five tracks not included in the original LP and comes with a poster. It's a lovely dose of whistling, honky-tonk pianos, and sweeping arrangements. The title cut was featured in the recent fourth volume of spaghetti western bootleg comps, *The Ecstasy of Gold*, put out by Semi-Automatic Records.

Best known for his work with Morricone on such films as *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* and *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, Bruno Nicolai did excellent work on his own. If you've never heard \$100,000 for Ringo, you should really track it down. However, it's not western themes that Finders Keepers are exploring with their pair of new releases out this month. First up is a 7-inch 'compact soundtrack' with four tracks from the 1971 Sergio Matrino giallo, *Your Vice Is a Locked Door and Only I Have the Key*.



Secondly comes a 10-inch release of music from *The Case of the Bloody Iris*, which the label accurately describes as 'rich, oblique paranoia pop'. The album's sourced from the original backup master tapes, and features as bonus cuts two variations on the 'Pursuit' theme. It's astonishing how absolutely creepy a harpsichord can be made to sound, and the way Nicolai manages to make baroque sounds uncomfortable and frightening is magnificent.

Last up this month is likely the biggest release: WaterTower Music's *Godzilla*, by Alexandre Desplat. We weren't able to get our hands on an advance copy, but given that in an interview with *The Daily Beast*, Desplat described the score as "non-stop fortissimo, with lots of brass, Japanese drums, and electric violin," and based on what we've been able to hear, the music should be appropriately epic. The opening track mixes the grandiose themes of Ifukube's classic 1954 score, combined with the bombastic nature of the *Godzilla March*. WaterTower's site has had the track listing up for several months, which kind of spoiled certain surprises from the movie well in advance of the even more spoiler-y Asian trailer that hit YouTube at the end of April.





# REVIEWS

STARBURST REVIEWS  
THE LATEST  
LITERARY RELEASES

## ALIEN

In space no one can hear you scream



A NOVEL BY  
**ALAN DEAN FOSTER**

SCREENPLAY BY DAN O'BANNON  
STORY BY DAN O'BANNON AND RONALD SHUSETT

### ALIEN: THE OFFICIAL MOVIE NOVELIZATION

AUTHOR: ALAN DEAN FOSTER / PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS /  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Reissued by Titan Books to mark the 35th anniversary of the seminal movie, the novelization of *Alien* by ridiculously prolific sci-fi/fantasy author Alan Dean Foster skillfully preserves its sense of bleak isolation, forbidding tension and relentless terror.

You all know the story: the skeleton crew of a commercial space craft unwittingly bring a hostile alien aboard that begins to stalk them through claustrophobic corridors

and pick them off one by one. However, while *Alien* is doubtless first and foremost a space-set horror film, in Foster's hands the story is transformed into hard sci-fi while maintaining the atmosphere of primordial fear. Details the film skips past (how the *Nostromo* traverses light-years in the space of months; the mechanics of space flight; the practical layout of the ship; the physical enormity of the mining refinery the ship is

dragging; the functionality of the alien's biological necessity to be immune to its own acid; speculation of what kind of people the space jockeys were) are effortlessly incorporated without seeming like appended afterthoughts. Likewise, rather than appearing as jarring departures, the expansion of the basic plot is seamlessly integrated into the recounting of the film's events. The only real problem is that the text jumps between character perspective with alarming regularity and little more than the occasional ellipsis to warn us, and as such, keeping up with whose viewpoint is being presented takes some focus.

The film's script was written with the idea that each of its characters could be played by anyone, meaning the crew are only described in the most general of physical terms, with their attitudes to their tasks and responsibilities aboard the ship and their position in its more clearly defined hierarchy forming much of their development. The story twists hold up when read with advance knowledge, such as thoughts from Ash's perspective remaining consistent with his later reveal as an android without actually giving it away, and Dallas easily being the most prominent character for most of the book, thus preserving the film's suckerpunch of his early departure after the alien is loosed. Within the context of the tense nightmare, even the transferred cinematic tropes that have become somewhat clichéd since the film's debut — such as the Final Girl and It Was Just The Cat — don't come off as such (while relevant in the film, the lack of character description negates Black Guy Always Dies and English Guy Is Evil).

Foster seems to have been working from an early version of the screenplay, as the book includes a number of sequences and exchanges

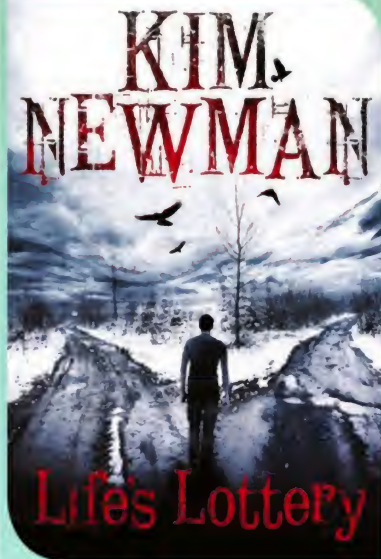
absent from the theatrical film (and in some cases, shot and then later cut), most significantly Ripley's discovery of Brett and Dallas' bodies, the latter still alive and trapped in a transmuting cocoon, begging her to kill him. Also, one scene describes a dark shape on Kane's lungs after being brought back aboard with the facehugger attached, foreshadowing his fate; another where the alien is almost ejected by opening an airlock, but is startled into safety at the last second by an alarm set off by Ash; and further exploration into just how much the Company knew about the situation the crew were being sent into, thereby amplifying their inhuman, profit-driven calculation.

Most surprising is how effective the generic descriptions of the alien itself are. Although lacking the iconic imagery of H.R. Geiger's chimeric nightmare, the alien manages to remain a terrifying threat by evoking the fear of the unknown. A creature so defiant of natural laws and utterly incomprehensible by any stretch of human knowledge or understanding, its very existence is almost as abominable as its actions. The "purity" of its motivations mark it as the ultimate apex predator, an entity without the emotion to be threatened or the intellect to be reasoned with, only the biological imperative to propagate itself regardless of what stands in its way.

While three and a half decades of sequels, prequels, crossovers and endless pop culture references might have diluted much of *Alien*'s original shock factor, even in text form the primal dread conjured by its events and themes is as timeless as the cold and empty darkness from which it spreads.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★★★★★ 9



## LIFE'S LOTTERY

AUTHOR: KIM NEWMAN / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A choose-your-own-adventure without an adventure. A Fighting Fantasy without the fighting... or the fantasy. Except, that's not quite true. Kim Newman's *Life's Lottery* is so many things at once that it's almost impossible to keep track of. Horror story, thriller, kitchen sink drama... what it is depends entirely on you, dear reader.

You are average everyman Keith Marion, and *Life's Lottery* will follow you from (pre)birth all the way to your end. Will you be rich and successful? Jobless and miserable? Married? Separated? A ladies man, lothario or, um, rapist and murderer? It all depends on how you play the game.

Where most role-playing novels are fairly linear – a lot of choices, but only one 'true' path – no two read-throughs of *Life's Lottery* are ever the same. The seemingly smallest decisions will affect the path upon which you are set, dictating whether you'll be happy, depressed or doomed to die in a multitude of terrible ways. Where some outcomes appear to be completely random (your first choice, for instance, being your favourite of two TV characters) others will be dictated by karma, chance and plain old intelligent choice-making. Look, just because you can have sex with your sister, doesn't mean that you should.

Just when you think you have a handle on the book, up comes another surprising outcome, ending or event. The first ten or so times you read it, *Life's Lottery* seems inexhaustible. It's more a book of short stories than a role-playing game, each one revealed as you choose your way through school, university and the dating scene. It can be a gritty revenge thriller, steamy sex tale or grisly murder mystery. This can make for uncomfortable reading at times, particularly as your choices lead you into progressively darker territory. Existential, depressing and terrifying, it leaves the reader feeling dirty in a manner I'd not experienced since playing *Manhunt* on the PS2.

Horror critic, scholar and writer Newman handles the multiple narratives with aplomb, packing the book full of humour, horror and so many geek references that it necessitates a hefty annotations section at the back. Clever, unpredictable and fresh, *Life's Lottery* is a great read. How you play it up to you. Just don't blame us if it leaves you feeling miserable and dirty afterwards. Karma, as they say, can be a bitch.

JOEL HARLEY

+++++ 9



## THE THREE

AUTHOR: SARAH LOTZ  
PUBLISHER: HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
RELEASE DATE: MAY 22ND

The Three is a book that's difficult to define, a tale that stretches across genres. Part horror, part sci-fi, part conspiracy thriller, part

discourse on the nature of humanity itself, it's vaguely reminiscent of something Dean Koontz would have written twenty years ago. Yet, Sarah Lotz's novel succeeds at being all of these at once, creating a story that is impossible to put down.

The initial premise is deceptively simple – four aeroplanes crash on the same day, yet somehow a child survives from three of them – but it's what comes afterwards that is central to the novel. To mention anything of the plot would be criminal; suffice to say, there's a book within this book, a fictional publication that analyses the aftermath of the plane crashes and the effect the survivors have on their loved ones as well as the world at large, making it all feel very personal, yet epic at the same time.

This is achieved by documenting the accounts of

various eye-witnesses, both professionally and personally related to the incidents, as well as the three survivors. This allows the author to drip-feed information that tantalises the reader to continue on to the next account. Each of these being relatively brief – a dozen pages at the most – the reader is then encouraged onto the next, then the next, until the final page is being turned. So be warned: once you start, you'd better cancel all your plans for the next couple of days, because you won't want to leave the book for a single minute.

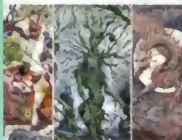
The author gives each of the accounts a different voice, allowing the reader to become familiar with the character in question. Their emotions are made apparent, but it's the sorrow and sense of dread that really make the book come alive. The latter pervades the story,

but is never overwhelming, increasing when it needs to, but more effective in smaller, more intimate moments. Still, the epic feel is never lost; the whole world is being affected here, as events begin to spiral out of control.

There are scenes that will sit in the mind of the reader for nights to come, knowing that it's the human reaction to the strange events that may lead to its downfall, rather than the events themselves. The Three is chillingly brilliant, a masterpiece of a story that leaves the reader hanging on every word, always wanting to know more; the only disappointment is that it has to end, but the finale is such that it may make you want to read it again and find the clues you've missed.

ALISTER DAVISON

+++++ 9

THE ART OF  
IAN MILLER
EDITED BY IAN MILLER & TITAN BOOKS  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY IAN MILLER
THE ART OF  
IAN MILLER

AUTHOR: IAN MILLER  
PUBLISHER: TITAN  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Role-players in their forties will doubtless be familiar with the work of Ian Miller, an artist whose work graced the covers and pages of many magazines and supplements. His distinctive pen-and-ink drawings (often looking more like etchings) are instantly recognisable as his work, the detail within each pulling the eye of the reader into it for a closer inspection. Titan Books have pulled together over 150 pages of Ian's work, combining notes from the man himself to produce a lavish and colourful portfolio.

It's a beautiful tome, with each page demanding full attention from the reader. Often, art books can be read with a few glances at each page, but not this one. Miller's style grabs the attention from the outset

and never lets go – here is a book that can be read in one sitting, but will demand that you return to it later, many times, for a full appreciation of the artist's work. While Miller's words seem few, they are always insightful; for the most part, he lets the art do the talking, as befits a book of this type.

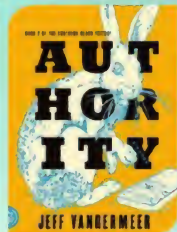
The book covers Miller's four-decade career without reducing it to a collection of White Dwarf covers (although a couple of memorable ones are there), ranging from dragons that look like they could breathe fire out of the page, to background sketches for films such as Ralph Bakshi's *Wizards* and covers for *Lovecraft* novels. Especially of interest is Miller's work for *The City* (a book on which he worked

with the late James Herbert) and the intricate architecture of *Gormenghast*. The art is grouped into categories, the last of which – *Dreams & Nightmares* – is a tour de force of images that are both beautiful and haunting.

Fans of Ian Miller won't be disappointed with this collection, and even those who've had only a passing acquaintance with his work will find it fascinating. It's a fitting tribute to the artist; the publishers and all concerned deserve a round of applause for giving Miller the care and appreciation his work richly deserves.

ALISTER DAVIDSON

★★★★★★★★★★ 9



## AUTHORITY

AUTHOR: JEFF VANDERMEER  
PUBLISHER: FOURTH ESTATE  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The second in The Southern Reach trilogy is a far different beast than the first. The narrative is surprisingly

comfortable, given its strangeness, and in many ways it's more of an accessible read.

Authority is set, for the most part, inside the heart of the clandestine Southern Reach and answers questions lingering from the previous novel. Knowing what became of the biologist is both joyous and disturbing. With Authority, the reader is able to see things from a more concrete, tangible position, it no longer feels like an outsider looking in, but rather the reader is the insider looking out.

The novel presents a more immediately recognisable environment, whereas *Annihilation* had an otherworldly feel. Area X could have sprung up anywhere, the biologist's flashbacks offering no definite location; Authority is more obviously cemented in America, contextualising the story and

giving the reader a handhold onto the narrative, a vantage point to take in the struggle between the other and the familiar.

Control is very much the reader's champion, leading them by the hand, a link between what the reader understands and the nebulous Area X. He's a palpable character, yet like all aspects of the novel he is oddly removed. The characterisation is deftly done, Control, Grace, Whitby and co are damaged but not so far gone as the women from *Annihilation*.

The text is visceral, saturated with paranoia and reminiscent of J.G. Ballard. The novel functions on the power of suggestion and, indeed, that's where most of the horror comes from, like a magician's sleight of hand. The pages describing an incident with some rabbits and camera footage are

particularly unpleasant.

The novel has a cut-up quality, a composition style favoured by David Bowie and William S. Burroughs, which gives the impression that the novel can be rearranged at will, read in multiple ways, like an unsettling choose-your-own adventure.

Authority is a work of sublime beauty and darkness, one takes neither the side of Area X nor those investigating it, instead it's a study in change. Jeff VanderMeer is one of the finest contemporary American authors and the third and final Southern Reach novel is sure to be quite spectacular, though you may want some light relief in the meantime.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★★★★ 8



## TRUE FIRE

AUTHOR: GARY MEEHAN  
PUBLISHER: QUERCUS  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

True Fire is intended for a young adult audience, but with its sharp and honest prose it exceeds that readership. The narrative is short and precise, weaving together tight, well-constructed sentences into sparse, poetic description which has a timeless quality. A personal tragedy sets the story in motion. While a village getting sacked is hardly the most original opening, the thrill of the quest is compelling. The story loses momentum as it progresses, before rising from the slump with a twists-a-plenty third act.

Megan is an endearing narrator, a strong-willed and hardy individual. She's not without a girlish side and a youthful desire for normality as

she discovers her pregnancy is more than an inconvenience.

YA writers have a responsibility to be attentive and mature with their writing, and Meehan handles the darker side of life with surprising finesse. There's a fair amount of socio-political commentary going on too, some of it buried in subtext, some of it more obvious. The text explores a lot of pressing issues, from gender politics to religion and, perhaps unsurprisingly, abortion.

On the downside, some of the conversation is far too modern and infused with the kind of jokes expected from all-night gaming sessions, often at odds with the setting.

The smart alec character

of Damon leaves a lot to be desired, and his introduction is about where the novel starts plodding along. While there are some surprising revelations to be had, his jokes fail to leave an impression. Elsewhere the quality isn't consistent, fluctuating between run-of-the-mill genre fiction and something altogether deeper and more interesting. There's some cringe-worthy metaphor and some gaudy innuendo, but all in all, *True Fire* is a rewarding novel that doesn't patronise its readers and offers a lot more than most young adult fiction.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

★★★★★★★★★★ 7



JOEL HARLEY PULLS  
MONITOR DUTY  
TO BRING YOU THE  
MONTH'S NEWS  
FROM THE WORLD  
OF COMICBOOKS

# VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

**I**t's always bad form to start off on a glum note, but it comes to me to open this month's instalment of *The View From the Watchtower* with some tragic news. The big, world-shattering tragedy is that the Wolverine is soon to be no more.

*The Death of Wolverine* is to kick off this September, shuffling Logan off the mortal coil with a big bang. The movies touched upon this in *The Wolverine*, but comic-book Wolverine hasn't been so easily cured of his affliction, with it to ultimately prove to be his downfall. Marvel have teased the event with a number of beautifully gory images depicting Wolverine's claws shattering, one by one. As he's so famously claimed on many occasions, Wolverine is the best he is at what he does – so no doubt his death will duly be one of the medium's best. Goodbye Wolverine – we hardly knew ye.

I jest, of course. He'll be back. Within a year, no doubt. If the death of Spider-Man, Batman, Superman, Jason Todd, Captain America, The Punisher (etcetera, etcetera) has taught us anything, it's that they *always* come back. Superhero resurrections are to comic books what Sean Bean is to death and cinema. And when it's a character as popular and omnipresent as the Wolverine? He'll be back even quicker. Just in time for the next *X-Men* movie sequel, no doubt. Expect to see hyperbolic headlines in the national newspapers, none of whom have caught on yet that they *always* come back...

Case in point, The Joker. No-one believed for a moment that we'd seen the last of the Clown Prince of Crime in Scott Snyder's *Death of the Family*, but the writer has officially revealed at DC's Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo panel that the Joker is working on his return. "Joker's story was always a two part story," Snyder told audiences, "but you'll have to be patient." Bleedingcool also reported that "Joker now hates Batman, and wants to bury him. He's scarier than ever." He was already pretty scary during *Death of the Family*, so I dread to imagine the shape this sequel will find him in. Why so serious, modern Joker?

Still, it's not all glum and dour in Batman's world. Snyder also teased an image from *Batman #31* (again, reported by Bleedingcool via C2E2) which featured the Dark Knight literally fighting a lion, illustrated by the ever-excellent Greg Capullo. Snyder and Capullo are going from strength to strength with their *Batman*, making it hands-down the best comic to come out of the New 52. The pair also seem to have a healthy respect for the tradition of Batman punching animals, with him thumping a horse in the face during the





finale of *Death of the Family*. More news on the Joker's return and Batman beating up animals as we get it.

Another character returning from apparent death is Spider-Man – specifically, Peter Parker. I've mentioned in previous instalments that Parker's return was imminent, but it's finally here in *Amazing Spider-Man #1* – just in time for the movie, no less. Featuring a grinning, mask-less Parker on the cover, we're left in no doubt that Doc Ock's grim (but surprisingly popular) Superior Spidey has left the building. Spider-Man's return is out now from all good comics vendors. Welcome back Parker. Until the next

inevitable faux-death, of course.

All this talk of death and resurrection? I thought last month was supposed to be the Easter issue. There is, believe it or not, non-death related news to be found in comics – you just have to look a little harder for it. In other news from C2E2, Marvel have revealed that Thor and Loki are set to meet the sister neither of them ever knew they had. This July, *Thor & Loki: The Tenth Realm* will introduce the bickering siblings to the aforementioned Angela. That's not the only big secret revealed here: the two gods also discover a secret Tenth Realm – the dimension from which Angela hails. What can we expect from Angela? Well, Al Ewing promised Comic Book Resources "a character who can kick Thor's head in any day of the week", so there's that to look forward to.

Elsewhere in the Marvel Universe, we find Star-Lord (of imminent *Guardians of the Galaxy* fame) set to get his own series in *The Legendary Star-Lord #1*, due to arrive in July. No-one knows for sure how audiences will react to *Guardians of the Galaxy*, but Marvel are certainly cashing in on all that extra publicity the characters will be getting. The Rocket Raccoon comic remains the most intriguing (you know, because it's a comic about a talking Raccoon with an affinity for giant guns) but it's good to see these characters get their time in the limelight. Cue the *Guardians* hipsters (you know who you are) bemoaning us 'casuals' only being interested because there's a movie out.

Also with a movie out and getting her own title is Ororo Munroe, aka Storm. Written by Greg Pak and illustrated by Victor Ibanez, *Storm #1* will see the weather-controlling mutant travelling the globe battling threats both man-made and

natural. Well, someone has to step into Wolverine's (actually quite small) shoes now that we're an X-Man down. And who better for the job than this underrated X-Lady, adding a little diversity to Marvel.

No, DC, I said *diversity*, not *multiversity*. DC Comics' *Multiversity* is on its way, spearheaded by shamanic comic book writer Grant Morrison. As you'd expect from Morrison, it's typically complicated. An 8 issue series consisting of 6 one-shots and a two-part conclusion, all taking part on a different parallel Earth from DC's main one. Bear with me, because I'm getting a headache thinking about it. To quote the blurb on DC Comics' official page: "Each world in the multiverse publishes comic books about the heroes on the OTHER worlds. Once the characters realise this, they then unite to respond to the villains!" Right. It's illustrated by Frank Quitely, so at least it'll look beautiful, even if we don't have a clue what's going on.

Meanwhile, in less mind-bending plotting, we see Dick Grayson turn in the domino mask in favour of something a little more James Bond for *Grayson #1*. Launching in July, the series will see Batman's former sidekick go from vigilante to superspy, ditching the (now redundant) Nightwing costume and joining *Spyral*, the tactical espionage agency introduced in *Batman Incorporated*. *Spyral*, gedit. Because they're spies. So much for stealth.

On that note, we wrap up another *View From the Watchtower*. What are you reading? What should I be reading? What's the best thing Batman has ever punched in the face? All this and more can be discussed by reaching me at the usual e-mail and Twitter handles. The answer to the latter question, by the way, is the horse, obviously.

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and tweeted @joelharley



STARBURST REVIEWS  
THE LATEST COMIC  
BOOK RELEASES

# REVIEWS



## TRANSFORMERS: DARK CYBERTRON VOLUME 1

WRITER: JAMES ROBERTS, JOHN BARBER / ARTIST: P. PHIL JIMENEZ, ANDREW GRIFFITH / PUBLISHER: IDW / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Event-style storytelling is an odd feature of mainstream comic books. It's a way for publishers to bring multiple storylines and characters into one greater tale, typically one with far-reaching consequences for the entire range. Usually, these work well because the characters and storytelling are similar in some way. Transformers: Dark Cybertron brings together IDW's two very different Transformers books – the light yet compelling More Than Meets the Eye and the much more violent, darker and po-faced Robots in Disguise – for one stellar adventure that attempts to resolve

multiple in-universe issues with both series and give them a bit of a fresh, reader-friendly start.

As such, Transformers: Dark Cybertron is a gloriously messy affair filled with epic space battles and big robots punching each other, coupled with lengthy chats. This first volume brings together Dark Cybertron issue one, More Than Meets the Eye issues 23 to 25, and Robots in Disguise 23 and 24 and you can easily see the join, not only in changes in the art but also the pacing and dialogue. This is jarring but the story is so compelling you'll want to forgive its many tiny flaws. Roberts and Barber

work well together here, laying a foundation of solid character building, never allowing the reader to get too comfortable with characters they've known for years.

If you're a Transformers fan then you probably already know that Optimus Prime was called Orion Pax before he became a Prime, but this book really does its best to get under the hero's metal shell and make us care about the big, dumb hero guy. It then does the same with Megatron, in a surprisingly effective way, and it's this mix of action and character-driven storytelling that really works.

Transformers: Dark Cybertron Volume One is the first step in an epic space opera tale featuring ancient enemies, old friends and a cosmos-spanning threat. The actual plot doesn't seem to matter at this stage; the Decepticon Shockwave is up to something utterly monstrous and the deceitful Starscream is yet again trying to take full advantage of the chaos for personal gain. What this book does is bring together most of the key players and inform us as to their motivations; this is only the first part of what will inevitably be a very long, slightly unwieldy, yet epic story arc. Big changes are indeed coming to the world of Transformers and they promise to be amazing.

Fans of the classic Transformers work (including Simon Furman's crazier story arcs) will get a huge rush out of this book, as it mines years of mythology. Casual Transformers fans are firmly advised to catch up on previous volumes of both More Than Meets the Eye and Robots in Disguise first, simply because this book contains spoilers for those series.

ED FORTUNE

+++++++ 8







## BLACK CANARY AND ZATANNA: BLOODSPELL

WRITER: PAUL DINI  
ARTIST: JOSEPH A. QUINONES JR.  
PUBLISHER: DC  
RELEASE DATE: MAY 21ST

Sometimes, DC gets it right. The recent DC52 range of comic books have been mostly disappointing, but the exceptions to the rule have been a lot of fun. Black Canary and Zatanna: Bloodspell is one of those special cases, ditching the grime and dirt of the current reboot and embracing hokey mysticism and two-fisted crime-fighting action.

The tale begins with younger versions of the two titular characters meeting up for the first time somewhere in Tibet, and then effortlessly switches to the modern day. As the Black Canary attempts to foil a casino heist, she gets embroiled in a mystical ritual quickly followed by a daring rocket-pack escape. As a result, Canary finds herself with a problem that requires the assistance of her top hat-wearing, Vegas-headlining, magic-slinging friend, Zatanna.

Given that the author of Black Canary and Zatanna: Bloodspell is none other than Paul Dini, it's safe to say that both characters are treated very well here. Dini is famously a massive fan of Zatanna especially, and coincidentally happens to be married to top hat-wearing Las Vegas stage magician Misty Lee, so it's not hard to work out where he draws inspiration for Zatanna from. Dini may not have such a strong muse for Canary, but he treats the character with respect, portraying her as the kind, intelligent and kickass heroine we've come to love. The chemistry between the two works well and it's light-hearted when it needs to be, picking up the pace when it

comes to the many action scenes.

Joe Quinone's art fits the story very well; it's light and cartoony for the most part, but Quinone effortlessly shifts gears and makes subtle changes to his style when the story demands more serious and more focused art. There's plenty of little details smuggled into the background and some obvious shout outs to various DC creators. Like Dini, the artist gets that this should be a fun adventure tale and has packed as much joy as possible onto the page, refusing to follow the growing trend of muted colours and murky line art.

It would be very nice indeed if DC started producing more funny, quirky, action-packed and clever adventures like these and a lot less angst-ridden and moody nonsense. More of this and less moping please.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 8



## MAGIC: THE GATHERING VOLUME 4 - THEROS

WRITER: JASON CIARAMELLA  
ARTIST: MARTIN COCCOLO, ERIC DESCHAMPS  
PUBLISHER: IDW  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Magic: The Gathering is an internationally renowned collectable card game that has been around for over twenty years. In that time it has turned from a geeky little bit of fun into a pretty significant deal; it has its own World Cup and high level tournaments involve serious money. The theme of the game is dueling wizards and the cards used in the game tend to contain both flavour text and detailed illustrations. Over the years these little snippets of world-building have grown to form a complex story and setting which is impenetrable to most outsiders.

Luckily, various novels and comic books have been able to chip away at this vast and detailed setting, letting those who don't know how to "tap" a card enjoy this world. Magic: The Gathering Volume 4 - Theros continues to detail the adventures of one Dak Fayden who is not only a dimension-hopping wizard, he's also the greatest thief in the Multiverse. One of the charms of the setting is that the key characters (called Planeswalkers) can travel from world to world, and this allows different characters from different sorts of fantasy settings to meet and beat each other up.

Theros is an exaggerated version of Hellenic Greece, filled with sea monsters and vain gods. Dak makes his way to the world partially at the urging of one of his recently acquired (and obviously cursed) artefacts and proceeds to stumble onto a rather sinister secret. Dak is a likeable character in a rather clichéd "loveable

rogue" sort of way and the entire tale is quite charming. Those not familiar with the setting may be a little surprised at some points, but nothing that should detract the reader from what is essentially a straightforward adventure fantasy.

One of the key features of the game is that each card features a nice bit of artwork, so as you'd expect, the comic book is very pretty indeed. The panel work is a little samey in places and this does mean that some of the more detailed pages lack the sort of impact they deserve, but overall Magic: The Gathering Volume 4 - Theros is a strong reflection of this popular pastime.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★★★★★ 6



# NEIL GAIMAN MURDER MYSTERIES P. CRAIG RUSSELL



KINDZIERSKI & SHOWMAN

## MURDER MYSTERIES

WRITER: NEIL GAIMAN  
ARTIST: P. CRAIG RUSSELL  
PUBLISHER: DARK HORSE  
RELEASE DATE: MAY 20TH

Neil Gaiman's Murder Mysteries is one of the author's personal favorites. Easy to see why: it's quintessential Gaiman, featuring dream-like sequences, harsh realities and a sense of disquieting whimsy. The tale originally started out as a short story but has since been adapted into many different forms of media, including this graphic novel, illustrated by P. Craig Russell.

The plot is the sort of urban fantasy that Gaiman is most famous for, that delicious blend of everyday happenstance and utterly wild strangeness. The tale begins with a chap coming from England to Los Angeles and after a disastrous personal encounter, he finds himself wandering the streets of the city. He meets up with a strange man who claims to be an angel, who then proceeds to unburden himself with an account of the first ever murder, one that happened before the Earth was finished.

At its heart, Murder Mysteries is a very simple tale; someone is killed and someone else flutters around the crime scene looking for the culprit. However, it is filled with layers upon layers; the entire investigation takes place on the construction site of creation itself and of course, an all-knowing God happens to be lurking in the background. Each element of the story asks its own question and this is not so much a whodunnit as who-didn't. Taken at face value, it's a fun little crime story, but once you start analysing all the little pieces it becomes a different

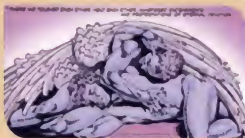
sort of affair, which is exactly what you should get from good crime fiction.

Russell's art is a very good fit for the prose, being beautiful in an unnatural sort of way and at the same time feeling ever so slightly unfinished. Given that the bulk of the story is set in the heart of creation itself, this works extremely well in context. Though prose adaptations often suffer from an all-too literal interpretation of the text, Russell gets it spot-on here. At no point is heaven too bland or too glorious and it contrasts brilliantly with the diverse yet dirty scenes back on Earth. The artwork brings impact to the prose during key scenes and works beautifully well.

Murder Mysteries is an odd graphic novel that should suit fans of Gaiman and those who like weird crime tales, and though it is a quick read, you will come back to it again and again, trying to uncover all the layers of mystery as you do.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



## BATMAN/SUPERMAN VOLUME 1: CROSS WORLD

WRITER: GREG PAK  
ARTIST: JAE LEE  
PUBLISHER: DC  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

One of the core relationships of the DC Universe is that between Superman and Batman. Superman is a god-like creature, powered by the Sun, who strives to do the right thing, driven by a sense of duty and responsibility. Batman is a mortal man who uses the night as a way to beat up criminals and is motivated by vengeance. The contrast between the two has been a constant source of ideas for comic book writers in the past, so it's rather essential in the New 52 reboot that they get this dynamic right.

Sadly, it tries so hard it flies pretty far past the mark. The plot is a convoluted one, in which the New 52 versions of Bruce and Clark grow to hate each other's sense of entitlement and privilege. Both heroes are rather unlikeable in this new setting and they need little provocation to start hitting each other, though this is thanks in part to the work of a demonic trickster. This leads to some dimension-hopping in which they meet much nicer versions of themselves who proceed to lecture them on how important it is they work together. The usually superb Greg Pak seems determined to crowbar in a destiny-style plot-line which really doesn't suit a team-up of the world's finest.

Jae Lee's artwork is beautifully dark. Each panel is a gorgeous mix of old and new, using modern techniques to render highly detailed characters and background and yet keeping an old school

vibe. The action scenes work very well indeed and it's quite cinematic; there's even a touch of lens flare. It's just a pity that the art does not reflect the plot.

Cross World should work; Lee and Pak are both brilliantly talented people and the idea behind the story seems sound. Ultimately, it's the New 52 versions of Superman and Batman that fail to engage the reader, sacrificing classical character dynamics for a post-modern, emo-esque moodiness that was interesting 30 years ago but now seems melodramatic, out of place and silly. The handful of people in world who are enjoying the New 52 so far will lap this up. The rest of us are firmly advised to pick up some back issues of World's Finest instead.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 6



Grant Kempter & Don Schaefer  
**insomniac** *part 2*

I just got hit by a car.  
At least, I dreamt I did.  
I think. Was it a dream?  
Or is this the dream?

It's happened again. Every time  
I wake up I'm somewhere new.  
Someone new. I'm still me, just  
different. Worse or... better.

Much better.


Someone else who's been  
through this? It can't be  
a coincidence. Can it?

maybe this guy will  
have the answers.

If I can't find  
the doctor...

Maybe he'll  
know how I  
can get back  
to my reality...





or maybe even stay in this one.

But that's not the weirdest part...

Cain had been for treatment too, somewhere different but the story is so familiar. He'd slept but had odd dreams of different lives. Then, when he'd finally woken up at home he'd somehow fixed his relationship.

he'd also found himself clutching a piece of paper in his hand.

Tell Ian she's his.  
He HAS to save her!

Nothing makes any sense any more. Who is 'she'? Rachel? Maybe, when I wake up still...

NO!



insomniac.series

www.insomniac-series.com

TO BE CONTINUED...

# PIXEL JUICE

VIDEOGAMING  
NEWS & PREVIEWS  
BY LEE PRICE



## E.T. Buried? The Myth is True!

We've all heard the story. Atari, flush with their dominance of the home console market, started pumping out a slew of low quality games in the belief that gamers would simply buy any old crap that they shovelled out. They didn't and gamers eventually left in their droves, eventually causing the games market crash in the early '80s that almost doomed the entire medium before it ever truly developed.

The E.T. game has been pointed out as one of the major culprits of the crash by many a talking head. Atari released the game after a rushed six week development schedule and it was as a bad as you would expect a game to be after only six weeks in development. Atari, in their wisdom, produced millions of cartridges with the expectation that gamers would simply buy it because of the movie, in addition to buying the

console too if they didn't already have it. Plenty did. Plenty more didn't. This left Atari with thousands of cartridges and nowhere to sell them. So, the legend went, they buried them in the desert and they were never heard of again.

Until now! It appears that one of gaming's most famous urban legends is actually true. A documentary team, working alongside Microsoft, went on the search for the legendary cartridges and actually discovered them in a landfill in a desert in New Mexico.

Pictures of the unearthed cartridges have been posted to Larry Hryb's (@majorjelson) Twitter account, alongside other games still in their shrink wrap.

Potentially thousands of the cartridges should now be excavated, alongside a slew of other discarded titles by the crew and the legend can finally be put to rest. Alien life has been found in the desert and many a gamer will be gleeful that it's actually happened!

## COMING SOON



## TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE DARK SPARK

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 24TH

*There's another Transformers film so, of course, there must be another Transformers game. Rise of the Dark Spark (on consoles) will allow players to take control of either the Autobots or Decepticons on a quest to respectively save or destroy the world. The handheld game will be more of a strategic RPG affair that, frankly, sounds a damn sight more interesting than the console version, which will undoubtedly follow the same formula as the other games in the series.*

## KICK-ASS 2 Game Announced

By the time you have this magazine in your hands Kick-Ass 2 may actually have been released. That's how unexpected this game's release announcement was when it came towards the backend of April.

Coming months after the film was released in cinemas, Kick-Ass 2 will be a traditional beat-em-up game that sees the player take control of the titular hero as he beats up a lot of people. Frankly, from the trailer it doesn't look particular good, with the stylised comic visuals coming off a little bit poorly and the fighting looking extremely slow and stilted. Maybe those issues will be sorted by the time the game is actually released but I'm not holding out too much hope for this one and it's a bit late to generate many sales based on excitement for the film either.

## COMING SOON



## XBLAZE CODE: EMBRYO

PLATFORM: PS3, VITA  
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 24TH

*There aren't enough games that play like a novel. Or at least that's the approach taken by Arc System Works, which took the BlazBlue fighting series and gave it the visual novel treatment. These sorts of games are pretty big in Japan and generally consist of a bunch of text over stills and video, with the player making choices to progress the storyline. The game has been out in Japan for almost a year now and is likely one for the hardcore BlazBlue enthusiast only.*

## COMING SOON



## SHERLOCK HOLMES: CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 24TH

*For such an interesting character, it's rather a surprise that there has never been a really great Sherlock Holmes game. It would have seemed the character was ripe for an adventure game during the era where those sorts of titles were major players. Still, Frogwares have been busily beavering away on their Adventures of Sherlock Holmes series and the latest looks to be the most promising yet.*

DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION  
Trailer Released

Following a mixed reaction to the second *Dragon Age* game, the future of the series looked a little bit uncertain. Happily, it appears that BioWare have persevered with the series, with the third title being prepared for an October launch. BioWare are now ready to get players really excited and have released a gameplay trailer that looks absolutely bloody awesome!

Inquisition will be released on all of

the major consoles and will see players take part in the inquisition that is set to hunt down 'the agents of chaos'. In this case this would be Mages, who have risen against the Templars of the series and caused all-out war in the land of Thedas. Anyone who is familiar with the series will know of the complications between the religious and the magical in the game, so it looks like the player will be choosing sides at some point.

Now if only BioWare would announce a sequel to *Jade Empire* we could really start to get excited.

Nintendo to Host SMASH  
BROS. Contest at E3

Nintendo has announced that it will be holding an invitational *Super Smash Bros.* tournament at E3, rather than giving an in-person press conference. I'm sure that has nothing to do with the company having very little on the horizon that will be able to compete against the excitement that is sure to be generated by Sony and Microsoft's conferences.

Instead the Big N will present a livestream and hope that people will only pay attention to there being more *Smash Bros.* and little of anything else.

Sixteen people are to be invited to the tournament, meaning that it won't even be free for regular attendees to take part in. Somehow we don't think this will generate the desired excitement.

## MAD MAX Game Progresses

It's one of the most fondly remembered post-apocalyptic films of all time and it has somehow managed to avoid having a good game based on it despite there being tons of material for a title.

That all changed a few months back when Sony and Avalanche Studios announced that they were working on an adaptation of *Mad Max*, which is due for release in late 2014/2015.

To whet gamer's appetites, Avalanche have released a new trailer highlighting one of the cars that will be featured in the game. It has plenty of promise, so let's hope it ends up more *Road Warrior* and less *Beyond Thunderdome*.

## COMING SOON



## LEGO NINJAGO: NINDROIDS

PLATFORM: VITA, 3DS

RELEASE DATE: JULY 23RD

Another month, another LEGO game. I swear I would not be looking at this were it not for a complete dearth of quality in the release schedule. You have to love the spring/summer games lull. *Nindroids* is the sequel to 2011's *LEGO Battles: Ninjago*, which sold a rather astonishing 2 million copies. Expect a bit of simplistic puzzling and the usual sort of fun but unchallenging LEGO action.





## Real Pip-Boy 3000 Created!

Fallout fans rejoice. A team of designers have created a fully functioning Pip-Boy 3000 that will be entered into the NASA Space App Challenge. The Pip-Boy is an awesome device in-game, allowing you to monitor your health, keep track of important stuff and generally find your way around.

What sets the device created by Ashley Hennefer and his team of designers apart is that it will feature a host of applications that actually make the thing useable!

The device will feature real-time mapping and a fully working Geiger counter and a host of other sensors that provide the user with useful information about their body and surroundings. It's a Pip-Boy that can actually be used! In space!

It can even transmit data to a central location. I want, I want, I want!

## COMING SOON



## PLANTS vs ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE

PLATFORM: PC

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 27TH

Remember *Plants vs Zombies*? It was a pretty major name in indie gaming a few years back. These days... not so much. Still there must be some value in the tower defence for a third game to be made. The title is already available on Xbox, but June will see the PC version coming to players. Fans of the series will be excited but there may actually be something here for people who want a simple blast or want to kill zombies with plants.

## COMING SOON



## TROPICO 5

PLATFORM: XBOX 360

RELEASE DATE: JUNE 30TH

This management sim, which offers a very viable alternative to the *SimCity* games, has been doing pretty well for itself in recent years. With a dedicated fanbase, Haemimont Games have been free to develop further titles in the series with the knowledge that they will sell decent numbers. The fifth game in the series marks a slight departure from the norm, allowing players to control their selected country right from the colonial era.

## Capcom Expected to Unveil RESIDENT EVIL 7 at E3

Rumours are circulating that Capcom are preparing to unveil the 7th game in the mainline *Resident Evil* series at the upcoming E3. This would be news to get really excited about if *Resident Evil*'s 5 and 6 didn't exist, but they do, so for now it's a cautious optimism from my end at least.

On the more positive side of things, series creator Shinji Mikami has hinted that the next *Resident Evil* game would be returning to the survival horror roots of the original games, who got absolutely sick of forced co-op mechanics and absolutely ridiculous 5-year-long boss battles that never...ever...end.

Currently it is believed the game will see a multi-format release, rather than being the Xbox One exclusive it had been expected to be. It's likely that an announcement from Capcom is imminent and will likely have been made by the time you have this magazine.

## XBOX ORIGINALS to Come in June

Microsoft's determination to ensure its Xbox One is not a games console will bear fruit in June, with the company announcing that it will be launching the first of its original TV content at the midway point of the year.

Microsoft's attempt to be Netflix will see the console feature the Spielberg directed *Halo* series plus a Ridley Scott directed *Halo* feature. Anybody would think that Microsoft don't have any more properties to adapt or something.

Also amongst the line-up will be *Humans*, which is an adaptation of the Swedish series *Real Humans* that may save some of the sci-fi fans that count themselves as part of the Xbox userbase.

A bunch of other stuff has also been announced but it would be nice to hear a bit more about some games, quite frankly.

## Marvel Superheroes Officially Announced for DISNEY INFINITY 2.0

It had to happen eventually. In fact, I believe this very column mentioned the rumours a little while ago and now it has been confirmed. Disney will be bringing a host of superheroes from the *Marvel Universe* into its sandbox.

The company will bring The Avengers to a party that has earned the company an astonishing \$500 million since the release of the first *Infinity*. It's a very impressive figure and Disney will be only too keen to help it grow by bringing some of the most successful characters of the last few years into the mix.

So... how long until we start seeing some *Star Wars* characters make an appearance?



## BATMAN ARKHAM ORIGINS: COLD, COLD HEART (DLC)

DEVELOPER: WARNER BROS. GAMES MONTREAL / PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. / PLATFORM: PS3, XBOX 360, PC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Work may be well underway on Arkham Batman's swansong with Arkham Knight, but he's not quite done with this generation just yet. The sulky young Batman of Arkham Origins is back, battling Mr. Freeze for the first time in this DLC add-on story.

Arkham Origins had the frostiest reception of the Arkham games, thanks to its glitchy mechanics, repetitive story and lack of Rocksteady polish. While it worked well in places, few could argue that it's up there with the greatness of Arkham Asylum and City. Still, any excuse to pull on the cape and cowl will do, even if it is far from Batman at his prime.

Cold, Cold Heart throws you into the middle of Batman's first encounter with Mr Freeze, the villain attacking during a fundraiser at Wayne Manor and kidnapping wealthy entrepreneur

Ferris Boyle. Kidnapping a guest and attempting to burn the place to the ground, it's hardly the best icebreaker for a first meeting between Batman and Victor Fries. Trapped in the middle of a grudge-match between Freeze, Boyle and the Penguin, a quick tour of Gotham is in order for Batman (thankfully not via that tedious bridge) to settle their collective hashes before one – or all of them – can do something terrible. Not forgetting, of course, to pick up some new threads with which to battle Fries and his freeze ray.

Where Harley Quinn's Revenge felt rushed and inconsequential, Arkham Origins' add-on tale is a surprisingly lengthy and story-orientated affair. Comics aficionados will recognise the story as a fairly faithful retelling of Mr Freeze's origins, albeit with added

Penguin and some padding in places. As the most tragic of Batman's villains, Freeze is a good choice as Big Bad, making a nice change from all the Joker-centric stories we've had of late, as well as providing a counterpoint to the series' aggression. Still, it would have been (nice to see a villain we've not fought before. The Penguin is quickly becoming overexposed to this universe, entertaining as his cockney antics might be.

You'll fight your way through Wayne Manor (the semi-destruction of which Batman seems fairly unconcerned about), Penguin's nightclub and a couple of other new locations, battering bad guys and skulking through stealth sections as you go. The gameplay is as gratifyingly punchy as it's ever been, while the goons are treated to a nifty new weapon with which to really disrupt your flow. Seems everyone in Arkham has a freeze ray of their own, making combat a slightly more frustrating affair. You could always cheat and use the electro-charge punching gloves (now with heat mode) but doing so will make you feel a little cheap and un-Batman like.

Fun, well-paced and surprisingly substantial, Cold, Cold Heart is well worth the relatively small price tag. Where Arkham Origins left many feeling cold, this DLC is pretty cool.

JOEL HARLEY



# ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE  
GUIDES YOU INTO  
THE REALM OF  
TABLETOP GAMING



I have asserted in previous columns that gaming is the new cool; that it is in fact the in thing and only the terminally square or oblivious aren't into gaming. It almost goes without saying that table top games, with their 3D inter-activity, highly social elements and immersive design are far, far cooler than video games. The facts pretty much speak for themselves: video gamers are everywhere but only the discerning geek knows their *Catan* from their *Carcassonne*. Still both types of fun are the current big thing. One of the ways you can tell is that those who fear new and exciting things have always been opposed to gaming.

Table-top gaming has a long history of inciting controversy. Like comic books and rock music before it, and videogames and the internet after, when *Dungeons and Dragons* first appeared, it caused moral panic. To put it another way, an exciting new form of media turned up and people who didn't understand it (typically

older, conservative types) ran about like beheaded poultry, worrying that it would it upset the status quo and blaming it for all the ills of the world. In the long term of course, roleplaying games won – calmer heads prevailed and the voices of ignorance found another falling sky to whine and shout about, but back in the day it did look like this harmless and productive hobby was going to get banned, simply to appease those who have their mouths wired directly to their bowels.

*Dungeons and Dragons* first came out in 1974, but it took till about 1977 for the game to really find its market and grow in popularity. As the game grew steadily in stature across the world so did concerns about its effect on the young. Being an American product, it was far more vulnerable to the USA's unique brand of Christianity and a series of books filled with drawings of succubae, serpents and scantily clad witches raised the eyebrow of more than one church pastor. Worse still, the game

featured multiple gods and magical spells. Despite these things being a mainstay of fantasy literature, self-appointed moral guardians eyed these toys with great suspicion and the fact that those playing such games tended to be socially awkward young people meant they were a pretty easy target.

Much of the focus of this concern and panic was due to the sad death of James Dallas Egbert III. Egbert was a child prodigy and a genius who suffered from mental health issues. In addition to drug problems and depression it is a confirmed fact that the 16-year old had difficulties fitting into the social scene of Michigan State University, the establishment he attended. He also played *Dungeons and Dragons*, like many young men at the time.

Egbert's first cry for help happened in 1979, when he entered a series of steam tunnels beneath the university with the intention of taking a drug overdose and ending his life. Egbert is known to have survived the attempt and was able to stay with a close friend whilst he recuperated. During this time he was reported missing and a media circus ensued. This led to the false assertion that Egbert had been live action roleplaying in the tunnels at the time; though we know the tunnels had been used as a LARP site by local gamers, no game was scheduled.

It's more likely this misinformation came about due to the local media's poor understanding of these types of games in general. The confusion hurt both hobbies and the legacy of this misinformation is still present to day, sad to say.

Worse still, a private investigator called in to find the boy alleged that *D&D* was at the heart of this mess, and though this was thoroughly refuted by Egbert later, the damage had been done. A more accurate reporting of the incident appeared in a 1984 book written by the private investigator involved in the case which, four years later, published interviews with Egbert that the boy had asked the investigator to keep private. By this time Egbert had been dead for 4 years, having successfully ended his life by self-inflicted gunshot wound.

This tragedy and misinformation in part led to the formation of an organisation called *Bothered about Dungeons and Dragons* (BADD). Formed by Patricia Pulling following the suicide



## Brilliant Computer Student Dies From Gun Wound

By WILLIAM BOBINS  
Special to The New York Times

DAYTON, Ohio, Aug. 17 — James Dallas Egbert III, the brilliant computer student whose mysterious disappearance last year still baffles official investigators, died yesterday as a result of a bullet wound that the police said they believed was self-inflicted.

The 17-year-old youth had hovered near death since Monday at Grandview Hospital, kept alive by life support machines. Dr. James Davis, the coroner, said today that the life support systems had been removed after "several electronic physicians indicated legal brain death."

In Ohio, he explained, there such findings are required before the systems can be removed. The hospital would not comment.

Early last week, after doctors announced that he had suffered irreversible brain damage and had no chance of recovering, his parents gave the hospital permission to make various organs available for transplants.

The hospital used a computer network to find recipients. Last night the hospital announced that its organs would go to living in several states, including Ohio.



James Dallas Egbert III

game called *Dungeons and Dragons*. Justice investigators speculated that the note and this played in a grotesque pattern on a computer screen had somehow been associated with the game, and there was speculation that he was playing a version of the game in a network of streets nearby under the campus.

### Intellectual Fantasy Game

Is the highly complex fantasy game, players assume the roles of contrived medieval characters who oppose each other in war campaigns. It was said that Dallas, who graduated from high school at the age of 14 and who had an IQ of 160, was attracted to the game by its intellectual challenge.

He was found last Sept. 12 in another state by a private investigator, William Dear of Dallas, who was engaged by his parents. The circumstances of the disappearance have never been explained, and Mr. Dear and the parents have refused to give details. Since last Monday the parents, Anna and James Dallas Egbert III, have declined to make comments of any kind.

Dallas Egbert transferred last year from Michigan State to Wright State Un-

iversity and *Mazes*.

The original novel is pretty much a dramatic retelling of the Egbert story, as reported in the media at the time. Or to put it another way, it's a pile of nonsense. The plot, such as it is, centres around a young man who gets too involved in a game, is driven mad and then can't see fact from fiction. Written to cash in on real life tragedy, parts of this entirely fictitious work was used by anti-game campaigners as "proof" that *D&D* was harmful. In 1982 it was turned into a TV movie with the same name.

The movie version is notorious for a number of reasons; not only is the plot pretty much designed to make parents terrified of their children having an imagination, it also features a young Tom Hanks in the central role. Oddly enough the Oscar winning actor doesn't talk about this scare-mongering and entirely unpleasant little feature at all. It has led to a peculiar bit of slang in the LARP community; taking a game too seriously is described as "Doing a Tom Hanks".

These days it gets used both to chide someone for being a bit of a ham actor and also for taking one of the world's silliest hobbies way too seriously.

There is also the 1983 movie *Skullduggery*. This involves a bunch of gamers going on a murder spree for some reason. It successfully confuses amateur dramatics with RPGs and LARP and also confuses shouting and gore with actual plot, but this is the least of its crimes. Whereas *Monsters and Mazes* is merely dull scaremongering with overly earnest acting, *Skullduggery* is an incomprehensible mess. Nominally a horror movie, the only truly scary thing is that it was made in the first place.

Table-top gaming is part of the overall world of gaming and media. RPGs do not get accused of causing people to become unwell in the same way that radio and television no longer get blamed for causing damage to the senses. Most of this controversy has now been consigned to the history books. The American federal agency Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed in 1991 that there is absolutely no connection between suicide and playing table top roleplaying games, and with fantasy literature now being a part of the mainstream, the rise in people playing those games is at an all-time high.

Gaming is now seen as an excellent way to improve social and cognitive skills and techniques developed at the tabletop are now used for training and interviewing. Still, it's only been thirty years and to this day there are those out there convinced that rolling dice and pretending to be someone else for a few hours is somehow evil.

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of her own son. Pulling blamed the game for pretty much everything. She claimed that *D&D* was "a fantasy role-playing game which uses demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, satanic type rituals, gambling, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, desecration, demon summoning, necromancies, divination and other teachings." Strangely, this makes the game sound much more interesting than it actually is. At the time BADD did seem to be a threat to the hobby, with pamphlets and the like being passed round small communities warning of this dangerous game. I can only imagine that teenage rebels looking for a spot of perversion were sorely disappointed when they discovered that *D&D* was nothing like the pamphlet claimed it was.

It's difficult to be angry at Pulling — she was a grieving parent looking for something to blame for a senseless loss and found an easy target in a popular teenage past-time. Her claims were never based on anything even approaching the truth and the various pamphlets that BADD produced were so riddled with made-up facts, bad mathematics and pure nonsense that it was child's play to pull it apart. If you really must, check out *The Pulling Report* by Michael A. Stackpole. BADD effectively ceased to exist in 1997 when Pulling died of lung cancer.

Of course where there is moral panic there is also someone out to make a cheap buck. Several novels were written to cash in on the tragic story of James Dallas Egbert III and the resulting media frenzy and confusion. John Coyne's *Hobgoblin* is perhaps the best of a bad bunch here; it's essentially a coming of age style story with a touch of horror thrown in. It does use the idea of *D&D* driving young men mad as its backdrop though, which reduces this middle-of-the-road horror thriller into something a bit tackier. If we want to go for truly tacky however, there is always *Monsters*



## STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ANDREW KEATES

Upon arriving at Heathrow Airport, I jumped onto a Hoppa bus that whisked me down the road to a conference centre connected to the Park Inn faster than you could say 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... I had arrived at the first, official, sold-out, Gerry Anderson convention. I knew this by the sign on the door and by the life-sized FAB 1 at the entrance. It was true, anything could happen in the next half hour, let alone over the next two days.

Anderson Entertainment packed in a huge amount to the space which, given the success of the event, I can only see getting bigger next year. It must be said the aesthetic of the convention was amazing. The amount of effort that had gone into dressing a soulless conference centre and transforming it into what I can only liken to something you'd expect to find in a national museum, was mind blowing. The main stage was a beautiful recreation of a Space 1999 set, bespoke artwork decked every wall, passionate model owners presented their collections and there were plenty of fascinating displays demonstrating how

various special effects had been pioneered, including the famous 'rolling road'.

It really struck a chord as I started to count the various productions that made up Anderson's enormous canon of work, just how many generations he delighted and excited. This was made even more apparent by the eclectic demographic of convention-goer in attendance and the tireless commitment from all of the hard-working staff who ensured that this event was as well-oiled as Space Sergeant 101.

What made Anderson so interesting were the panels of casts and crews that worked on so many of the shows. Over fifty different actors, directors, special effects artists, illustrators, puppeteers and even a few legends (including the great Nicholas Parsons) attended, all of whom made plenty of time to tell their stories, sign autographs and make themselves available to all those that wanted to share in the magic of Anderson. There was even a wonderful surprise announcement that Terrahawks will be returning next year in a series of Big

Finish audio dramas! The talks could not have been bettered in programming and I must mention Kevin Davies, who hosted so many of these discussions superbly.

Taking all of the above into account, there is something else that saturated this event. I won't appeal to your imagination in describing it, rather it would be better if I asked you to cast your mind back and see if you can remember it instead. It's the same feeling you had when you first saw Thunderbird 4 launch from the belly of Thunderbird 2, when you hid behind the sofa as the Mysterys skated across the surface of the moon and when you would pretend to co-pilot Stingray in your pyjamas at the foot of your bed. The feeling I'm asking you to recall could never have been booked and inserted into an event schedule by the organisers, yet it was in the eyes of every single person I saw. I found it creeping inside me as I looked into the eyes of a Virgil marionette that I suddenly found sitting on my knee, I felt it again when the voice of Parker emanated from actor David Graham and even as I stood inches away from the real Moon Base Alpha. I hadn't experienced this feeling since that Christmas morning when Santa managed to find me a Tracy Island and I certainly hadn't expected to experience it again in a conference centre in Heathrow. But I did. And that's the feeling of pure, unadulterated, childhood joy.

Gerry Anderson is responsible for one of Britain's greatest institutions, and this event is a true testament to his legacy. This convention could not have been manipulated by a more sensitive and masterful puppeteer than the son of the great man himself and Anderson Entertainment company director, Jamie Anderson. I can only presume that his father would have been just as proud of him, and his event, as everyone who attended were grateful that they could be there to share it with him.

F - A - B!

FOR ALL ANDERSON ENTERTAINMENT NEWS  
AND EVENT INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT:

Website: [www.anderson-entertainment.co.uk](http://www.anderson-entertainment.co.uk)

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## INTERVIEW: NICHOLAS PARSONS

WORDS: ANDREW KEATES

**How did you come to be associated with Gerry Anderson?**

It's a very good story. My wife at the time (Denise Ryan) had done a lot of voiceovers for Gerry. She had worked for him on two or three series, and Gerry was doing a new series called *Four Feather Falls*. He came up to the house to meet Denise to ask her to suggest some voices for some of the characters. And he outlined the shows, the characters and he had some of the scripts. He then turned to me and said, "Nicholas, it would be of great help if you would be very kind and read with us".

Now, I'm an actor, I'm also a mimic, because that's how I started in this business, even though I'm known as a presenter, I'm an actor first of all and I can do many different voices. So I picked up the script and I cued her in, and I put on this American voice and at the end of the session, Gerry said we have found some very good voices for Denise to supply for the characters in the show, but I think we've also found our Tex Tucker.

Unconsciously and without realising it, I had done an audition and I got the part!

**You've been part of some great British institutions throughout your career. After so much hard work, many would be looking for a rest, yet here you are, still sat talking with fans. Why do you continue to work so hard to keep these series alive?**

My work keeps me young and keeps me going. I'm always very flattered when people still want to work with me at my age. I mean,

when people say to me, "are you going to retire?", the answer is terribly simple. I'm in a profession, where if they think you can no longer do the job, you're finished; you're on the scrapheap and as long as I get acclaim for what I do and the public like me, and the employers like me, then I'll go on working.

**You regularly tour your one-man show all over the country, telling anecdotes from your career, would you mind telling us the one about your time appearing in the Doctor Who episode The Curse of Fenric opposite Sylvester McCoy?**

I was playing this reverend and apparently a lot of people say I'm good type-casting as a vicar. I remember, Johnny Speight, who used to write such wonderful sketches for things like the Arthur Haynes Show, and he often used to write sketches around vicars and he used to say to me "you've got a vicar's face".

Anyway, we were filming on location somewhere in Sussex. When this real vicar from the parish came up to me and said you really should have this special garment, let me lend you mine. So I was wandering around looking even more convincing, when this woman came up to me and said, "oh vicar! I'm so pleased I caught you. I wanted to ask you, can we come and have a chat with you about a christening?". And I said, "I'd be delighted to talk to you about a Christening, but I don't think I'll be very much use to you, but if you talk to the vicar from the parish, I'm sure he can help..."

She said, "My god! You're Nicholas Parsons, I mean Nicholas Parsons. I'm so sorry!", I said, "No, no no! I'm so flattered that you thought I was the vicar of this parish, as I must be so convincing as a vicar, and I do hope you'll be watching Doctor Who when it comes out".

## INTERVIEW: DAVID GRAHAM

WORDS: ANDREW KEATES

**How did you become involved with Gerry Anderson?**

I met Gerry on a TV film and he happened to be directing me and we had never met before, it was just a run-of-the-mill TV film, where I played a villain. And we just got talking mid-takes and he said he was hoping to start doing childrens animation series and I said, well I'm not too bad at doing accents, and that was the beginning of the story. So I started in *Four Feather Falls* and ended up doing five series for him, which was great.

**You are perhaps best known for playing Parker and Brains, amongst a whole host of other characters in many different Anderson and other cult entertainment series. Who has been your favourite character to play?**

I loved most of the voices I've ever done, even in *Four Feather Falls*! Gramps – who I based on a famous Western actor in Hollywood called Walter Brennan who appeared in every Western was a great favourite. But of course Brains and Parker from were very much favourites with the general public and the fans. In fact if you see the credits on *Thunderbirds*, Parker isn't even credited. But he became Gerry's

favourite. And of course, I based him on a wine-waiter in a pub that Gerry took me to for lunch, in Cookham. Gerry called this chap over to serve us and this waiter said... **[David puts on the voice of Parker]**. "Would you like to see the wine list, sir". And that was the basis of Parker.

**You have done so much on film, radio, stage and television. How does it feel to be best known for something you aren't necessarily recognised for?**

I don't mind that because I'm just an ordinary working character actor and everything I've done, I've put my heart and soul into and it is all equally as important. I suppose you could say a high-point of my career was working with Sir Laurence Olivier in his company on a play with him at the National Theatre. I was once so terrified that I wasn't going down very well, that he stopped me in the wings and said, "David, I think what you're doing is marvelous!" I think he liked me. But it's not to say I downplay my time at the National in that I don't downplay my work with Gerry Anderson, they're both equally as important to me, because every job I do, even if it's a voice over is just as important as when I did plays with the great actor, Leonard Rossiter. I just love to do what I do and I'm grateful when I get to do it.

**You've also lent your voice to another sci-fi institution I believe...**

Yes! I created the voices of the Daleks

with Peter Hawkins, who was a great voice actor, who sadly died about twenty years ago. We used to go down to Lime Grove and pre-record the Dalek voices for all the early William Hartnell episodes. I later appeared with Tom Baker many years later as Professor Karkensky in an episode called *The City of Death*.

**How did you and Peter come up with how a Dalek should sound?**

We just kicked it around. They wanted something with menace, so Peter and I added this staccato, machine-like-quality, then they fed it through a synthesizer and that seemed to catch on. But the truth is we just came up with it in an afternoon. But that's what actors have to do. It's just like being a voice-over, if you've got thirty seconds to deliver, you've just got to do it. Luckily, I have a facility for doing quick work. In America they do all these different actor's studios and things like that, but I don't have time for all that. Over here we just have intelligence, energy and a great amount of just 'getting on with it!'

**What would you like to be remembered for?**

I wouldn't want to be remembered for one specific thing. I'd just like to be remembered as an actor whose work was appreciated and as someone who never gave less than 100% in everything that he did.



## Jimmy

By S.L. Dixon

The snow melted away in a perfect circle, forming an icy ridge that continued to carry away from the flame. Jimmy could no longer hear the screams or cries, the awful shrieking little Susan made as she tugged hard against the door; the family was quiet and the only sound was the crackling of flames as they licked their way up the frame of the home, congealing the cheap plastic siding.

Jimmy didn't mind, it had happened before.

The Johnsons: Karen and Fred, their children, Luke and Bradley and that scruffy mongrel, Duke. They didn't scream; not quite.

Splashes of liquid rat poison in their hot cocoa, cocoa can mask the taste of just about anything.

A few squeezes of the bottle for each of the kids, a few more for the parents and a good helping for the dog. Jimmy hated the dog most of all.

He assumed they'd go peacefully into the dark abyss of death. He was wrong. Having to work quickly, Jimmy disconnected the phones, switched off the lights - Jimmy didn't need any nosy neighbors seeing - and finally locked the doors from the inside.

When would people learn that the real dangers of the world come from within?

Winking and squirming and choking and gasping, their pleas falling on an apathetic ear, Jimmy stood above the family: watching.

He didn't mind, it wasn't the first time.

Ralph and Virginia Robinson, they didn't have any kids, not until Jimmy came around.

They screamed, they begged, they threw themselves against the door. The Stanley deadbolt held.

It wasn't so hard to get them into the fruit cellar, the little room with mud walls and foggy jars of ancient preserves sitting on all the shelves; it wasn't so hard at all.

They'd made him go down there all the time and he'd tested the deadbolt by throwing his own body against it, all the while spiders and creepers investigated his being, into his shirt, up his shorts, all over his body, just because he refused to eat broccoli.

They screamed just as he had.

One night, after turning up his nose at some greens, Jimmy noticed a small billiard ball sized hole in the wall of the cellar that let in the light from the swinging... it seemed forever swinging - ...bulb hanging from the ceiling, and Jimmy got an idea.

Ralph used much of the basement to work on small engines; he'd just fixed up a Briggs and Stratton off an

old riding mower. It was dirty and a little rusty, but it would work.

*"Did you guys ever notice that shiny handle sticking out of the mud wall? I think it's a really old box or a chest, maybe it's worth something,"* said Jimmy suggestively to his new parents.

Ralph and Virginia, always on the lookout for easy money, scurried to the basement; forgetting the Wheel of Fortune and their evening snacks.

To the basement they went.

Door locked, garden hose firmly in place through the hole in the wall, the other end over the exhaust of the engine; Jimmy tugged with all his might, all his hate, all his broken heart.

First pull; the handle of the recoil digging into his palm.

Second pull; a light sputter.

Third pull; nothing but pain in his fingers and hand from the hard handle.

Push; a push on that squishy yellow bubble, the one he'd seen Ralph push to make the engine start.

Fourth pull; success.

The engine roared to life, chugging a bit now and then, but doing the job all the same.

The door barely moved.

Good door, good Stanley, Jimmy thought to himself over the banging and the screams.

So much noise; followed by so much silence, other than that purring, sputtering, shaking Briggs and Stratton of course.

Jimmy didn't mind he'd heard it all before.

Swimming pools can be very dangerous things, deadly in fact.

Jimmy tried to be a

big boy, a strong boy, but he cried for days once he got put in that home. It wasn't home. Home was with his mommy.

Jimmy had been under the care of the Jacobs for two weeks; a new mom, Margaret, a new dad, Scott, and a new brother, Stevie. The family was much nicer than the Robinsons, but Jimmy didn't know that yet. Every moment of the day they tried to include him; the perfect family, always together, always loving, but never his mommy.

Jimmy could still remember Margaret's scream,

"JIMMY NO," as he stood poolside, the entire



family floating and bobbing in the big cement tomb.

The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round...

The giant silver boom-box flying from Jimmy's hand; splash.

The bodies in the pool float upside down, upside down, upside down...

Jimmy always liked that song; his mommy used to sing it to him, so he unplugged the extension cord from the wall and tugged the stereo from the pool. He took a plastic paddle and swung at the eject button, he didn't want a shock, the button clicked and he could flip the player over to retrieve the CD.

The bodies still floated only feet away, all still looking as if at any moment they might flip over and yell:

"SURPRISE!" but Jimmy knew they were dead, he didn't mind, he'd done it once before.

Jimmy watched as his mommy and her new boyfriend, Eric, downed beer after beer,

"Go to bed you little punk," Eric hissed, "your mommy and me need some privacy."

The crawlspace under the stairs, so dark, so inviting, Eric wouldn't find him there.

Why does mommy need another guy around anyway? She has me, thought Jimmy as he lurched out of the crawlspace and stepped carefully through the hallway to his mommy's bedroom.

Creak.

Jimmy paused, hoping not to be heard. He waited; terrified that Eric would get up and give him another spanking, like the time he knocked over the ashtray.

A regular creaking sound came through the crack and a light moan. Jimmy popped his head in the door, Eric was on top of mommy; her eyes closed, moaning in pain.

The hand covering Jimmy's mouth enveloped his scream and any air trying to find its way to his lungs; he wriggled to free himself from the hand before he realised that the hand was his own. He's killing her! Jimmy, unable to hold it all in, let out a peep, the tiniest peep

and Eric turned to face him, Jimmy's mommy didn't move.

"GET OUT!" Eric screamed.

Jimmy ran, his feet burning against the carpet as he skidded to a halt.

"Maybe I can save her," Jimmy said in a half breath, the kind he took when he knew he was in big trouble.

There seemed to be no answers, everywhere Jimmy looked he saw no help to save his mommy.

His toy box maybe, but there was nothing there to stop a big scary man like Eric.

The bathroom perhaps? Nothing there either.

Finally, the kitchen, the knives. That would stop Eric.

The world ceased to exist beyond the hallway as Jimmy walked gently over the carpet and toward his mommy's room.

There was snoring.

Sleep had taken hold of Eric and he was on his back, no longer attacking Jimmy's mommy.

Mommy, are you OK? asked Jimmy somewhere deep in his mind.

The sleeping, or rather, passed out woman, rolled onto her side.

She's alive, thought Jimmy as he ran around to Eric's side of the bed.

The side that he used to sleep on when he had a bad dream.

The side mommy used to cuddle with him and tuck him in; Jimmy's side.

No precision needed.

Stab.

Pull.

Stab.

Pull.

The blood pooled everywhere and Jimmy ran to wash his hands and face, his mommy rolled over and clutched the knife that sat deep in Eric's chest, while Jimmy made his way into the hall.

She screamed, further fueling Jimmy's little feet upstairs and into the bathroom.

It should have worked.

It should have been just Jimmy and mommy again.

No Eric, no other mommies, or daddies, or sisters, or brothers, just Jimmy and mommy.

Jimmy stood outside the Johnson home, the fire trucks and police cruisers racing to the scene of the gruesome human incinerator, but it was too late.

The whole family was dead and Jimmy wondered if he'd finally get to be with mommy again.

He knew where she was, or at least had an idea where. A lawyer told Jimmy that his mommy was going away, Incarcerated For Homicide, wherever that was.

Jimmy didn't know, but he knew if he tried real hard he could get there eventually.

Art: Rylan Cavell

# PAUL MOUNT'S



This month we get down with 'the kids' in **THE TOMORROW PEOPLE** and **STAR-CROSSED**, two teen-themed fantasy shows from The CW Network and take a nostalgic look at Horror Channel's season of classic **DOCTOR WHO** repeats...

It's **The Tomorrow People** but not as oldies like me know it. Of course The CW Network's snappy new shirts-off-lads superteen drama shares some superficial genetic television material with the cardboard and silver foil 1970's ITV kid's show fondly remembered by those of a certain age. The name's the same, obviously, and so are the kids' powers. There's an underground base near an underground/subway station and a computer named TIM in the ceiling - but this new **Tomorrow People** series bears as much resemblance to the show which inspired it as... well, as modern **Doctor Who** does to its own trail-blazing early days in the 1960s. But more on that later...

Whilst the original **The Tomorrow People** (and/or its slick if slightly

soulless short-lived 1990s reboot) isn't exactly a show which has maintained the sort of active and... er... outspoken fanbase of the good Doctor, it's fair to say that those interested in seeing what the CW crowd would come up with probably weren't really expecting much from this new version of an old favourite. Berthed in its new home, this was clearly going to be a show aimed at a very specific demographic - hormonal teenagers, basically - and there was precious little hope of outrageous aliens, silly ray guns or even Peter Davison in a curly wig and a nappy making an appearance to remind us of the good old days. The new **Tomorrow People** is, inevitably fantasy-lite. It's an adventure series aimed at slightly imaginative

teenagers/young adults but it's not (and was never going to be) too extreme or ground-breaking. The new homo-superior hijinks were inevitably going to focus on damned good-lookin' boys and girls with now-familiar superpowers (**X-Men**, **Heroes**, **Mutant X** et al have taken the 'wow' factor out of the idea of mutant kids with extraordinary abilities) battling bad guys in suits whilst falling in and out of love with each other and occasionally rolling around in their pants. In other words, **The Tomorrow People** was going to be safe, sanitised and... well, samey...

And yet... it's actually rather good. Where the 'old' series was resolutely a children's show playing on pre-pubescent fantasies of being better than all those pesky adults, the new series depicts the **Tomorrow People** as outsiders, grubbing out an existence on a subterranean refuge and hiding from an organisation dedicated to wiping out this superhuman threat to humanity. 1970's kids gaped in awe and envy as the original TP constantly got the better of foolish older authority figures, put on their shiny spacesuits and 'jaunted' to other planets and shot (but never killed) aliens with their Woolworths space guns. But savvy teens watching today's show probably wouldn't much fancy skulking about with this new generation of the next stage of human evolution who are more concerned with just staying alive than ushering in a new and better era for Mankind. The new **Tomorrow People** don't even regard themselves as human; the rest of the world is, as it ever was, full of 'Saps' who are to be detested and avoided as much as possible. The 1970s show might have inadvertently reassured its audience that it was okay - and even exciting - to be *different* but the new series makes it quite clear that it's no fun standing out from the crowd and that outsiders are always going to be in for a tough time.

So whilst the new series has a very different ideology, it's still capable of telling an interesting, action-packed







and dynamic story. Robbie Amell plays Stephen Jameson (a considerably more accomplished performer than the actor who played the same-named character in the 1970s series) who, at the start of the episode, 'breaks out' as his new powers - telekinesis, teleportation, telepathy and, peculiar to him, the ability to freeze time - manifest themselves and he comes to the attention of the Tomorrow People led by John (Luke Mitchell) and Cara (Peyton List... sounds like something you'd take into B&Q) who are hiding from the attentions of Ultra, a genetic cleansing organisation dedicating to neutralising and wiping out the threat of the new mutants. Ultra is headed by the charismatic Jedekiah Price (Mark Pellegrino) who, as it happens, is Stephen's uncle. Unaware that Stephen has already fallen in with the Tomorrow People, Jedekiah enrolls Stephen into the organisation, but Stephen is planning to bring the organisation down from within. Then there's the mystery of Stephen's missing-presumed-dead Dad, Jedekiah's previous avuncular relationship with John, John fancying Cara, Cara fancying Stephen, Stephen's 'Sap' best friend Astrid secretly fancying Stephen; it's an inevitable and predictable mix of soap opera staples and tame conspiracy mystery designed to appeal to the more switched-on teenager. But whilst the whole Ultra set-up underpins the series and is clearly the show's driving 'arc', the Tomorrow People also occasionally face-off against other rogue homo-superior who abhor humanity far more than John and his group are wary of them and occasional recurring villains include the sadistic Julian Masters and the mysterious Founder who's pulling the strings behind the scenes at Ultra.

In some ways it's all fairly generic stuff and yet, after about six episodes when we've finally come to terms with the fact that this really isn't the 1970s show but is actually a radical and rather clever reinvention, it starts to find its feet and its own identity. Packed with

snappy visual effects, frenetic fight sequences and a surprising amount of quite brutal violence, it's not the soft-focus feel good fantasy hour it could so easily have been. **The Tomorrow People** has been given an edge and, whilst it's not averse to toppling into cliché from time to time, when it's firing on all cylinders it's genuinely exciting, occasionally unpredictable and almost always eminently watchable thanks to largely-intelligent scripting and punchy performances from a likable and, of course, attractive cast. Oh, and it's got a fantastic built-in drinking game courtesy of the always-empty subway carriage which features at least once in virtually every episode...

Unfortunately though, it looks like **The Tomorrow People** is destined to become yesterday's news as US ratings have been at best lacklustre. It's a shame because the show has grown in both stature and confidence as the episodes have rolled by and whilst I'm not expecting the Thargons, the Kleptons or the Spidron to turn up any time soon, a second season might see the show

really start to explore its potential and become something very special indeed. At the time of writing, a decision on the show's fate is still awaited and The CW have already renewed most of their new and established dramas, so you don't have to have telepathic powers to realise that the omens aren't good. Barring a miracle - or a huge leap of faith from the high-ups at The CW Network - it looks like **The Tomorrow People** are about to jaunt off our TV screens forever.

## STAR-CROSSED

I'm not much of a betting man but I'd wager a few space-credits that **Star-Crossed**, another of The CW's new teen-friendly fantasy shows, won't be around for much longer either. Frankly, I'm not surprised because it's as dull as ditchwater. I'm reminded of the far better Warner Brothers/UPN drama **Roswell** (1999-2002), in which descendants of alien survivors from the legendary so-called 'alien spacecraft' crash in New Mexico attempt to ingratiate themselves into the local high school scene years later. **Roswell** was a hugely-schizophrenic show which jumped through all sorts of hoops across its three seasons - teen love drama, hardcore sci-fi, a mixture of both - in its desperation to find anyone interested in it. **Star-Crossed** tries to be a bit of everything too but ends up being a weak stew of warmed-over ingredients we've all seen far too often.

A massive alien spaceship from the planet Atria crash-lands outside Louisiana. The military, not surprisingly, slaughters most of the aliens who are humanoid apart from silly tattoos on their skin. A six-year-old girl called Emery shelters an alien child called Roman but eventually the military corner and shoot him. Ten years later and Emery, now a willowy young teen, discovers that Roman is alive and hunky and one of seven young Atrians enrolled into the local high school in an attempt to encourage integration between humanity and the aliens. I'm yawning as





I'm writing, by the way. Anyway, many of the teen Atrians (most of whom have huge necks and look about thirty-four) are hostile towards the human teens (they all need their heads banging together if you ask me) and soon rival factions are springing up even as Roman and Emery are forced to confront their growing feelings for one another.

Not only is *Star-Crossed* witlessly derivative, it's also utterly charmless and bereft of any real excitement or tension. Who cares about any of this? In its favour - and because I like to find the good in everything - *Star-Crossed* looks fantastic and huge effort has gone into visualising a world ten years into the future with everyone wielding slimline see-through phones and tablets and there's a real design aesthetic at work in the way the show has been put together and filmed. But sadly it all counts for little or nothing as the story is just dreary and predictable and seen-it-all-before and its cast of characters so wearisomely boring and unlikeable. To be fair, though, we had to wait until episode three for a couple of the lads to get their shirts off which must be a record for a show on The CW Network. With ratings which make *The Tomorrow People* look like the blockbuster runaway hit of the season, *Star-Crossed* isn't likely to be long for this world or any other. It seems that the Atrians might need to bugger off back where they came from because it seems that no-one's much interested in their antics down here.

## DOCTOR WHO DOES HORROR

It's always nice to see 'classic' Doctor Who back on the box - bar the odd 'anniversary' repeat the old series has been locked away out of sight like some mad and embarrassingly rambling old granny since the all-singing, all-dancing new series debuted in 2005. Hats off to Horror Channel, of all people, for bagging the rights to some of the show's best-

loved (and best) serials and reminding the Matt Smith fan boys that there's more to TARDIS travel than fezzes and impossible girls and bloody wibbly wobbly timey whatsit. These episodes are all on my DVD shelves, of course they are, but who (geddit?) could resist the thrill of actually sitting in front of the telly and watching old Doctor Who knowing that thousands of other people are doing the same thing at exactly the same time. That's really what it's all about, surely?

From the repeat season I've been struck, yet again, by what a powerful and affecting piece of television that very first episode, '*An Unearthly Child*', remains over fifty years later. Anthony Coburn's script is economic, to the point (not a moment is wasted on half-arsed gags or prat-falling), dramatic, gripping and, above all, utterly believable. The following three episodes, chronicling the adventures of the new Team TARDIS in Paleolithic times as a tribe of caveman battle to rediscover the secret of fire,

are often dismissed as tedious and drab but they're actually fundamental not only in establishing the relationship between the Doctor and his new, if entirely unwilling, companions, but they act as a template for what's to come across pretty much the next fifty years. It's grim and visceral and generally just surprisingly good.

Dartboard time again, I'm afraid. I couldn't help but wonder how the early years of Doctor Who might have played out had current show boss Steven Moffat been in charge. Hartnell's Doctor rushing around the TARDIS waving his arms about shrieking "Doctor Who? Doctor Who??? Doctor... Who??" in between bouts of declaring that "Astrakhan hats are cool!"; Barbara, permanently on heat, sticking her hand up the back of the Doctor's cloak whilst flashing him her fashionable 1960s bloomers and Ian as the simpering man-child hanging on Barbara's every word before being repeatedly killed off and brought back, incomprehensibly, as a caveman/Voord/Slyther. Susan would be an irritating, know-it-all teenager obsessed with pop music... so no change there. Best not think about it.

Horror's season continues - Troughton repeats such as '*Seeds of Death*' and '*The Mind Robber*', Pertwee in '*Terror of the Autons*' and '*The Daemons*', Tom Baker's glorious '*Genesis of the Daleks*' and '*Brian of Morbius*' and Peter Davison's exemplary swansong '*Caves of Androzani*' (just turn a blind eye to the Magma beast). Wonderful stuff, all of them. If you're brave (or foolhardy) enough, you might even want to explore the murkier waters of the last couple of original Doctors but I can't be held responsible for the consequences and you can jolly well buy a new television out of your own pockets, thanks all the same.

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# it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

Fandom is a funny thing. When it is a positive force it can lead to massive sea changes, and has often played an important part in the longevity and endurance of many properties. *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* have benefitted hugely from the existence of hard-core fandom that kept the torch burning, but I have always hated and despised the other side of fandom. I think we are all aware of "those" types of fans. They take ownership of the show usually because they produce a fanzine and have met some of the people they used to idolize. Over the years I have met lots of these clowns, and they always end up causing friction with all the other normal fans (you know, the ones that just want to get on with watching and enjoying the show). In the long term, they end up damaging the shows themselves. It was with disbelief that I recently witnessed this happen in a very public and pretty vile manner from someone who really ought to have known better...

Fandom have done a superb job keeping the properties of Gerry Anderson within the public affections since 1981. Despite the sad loss of Gerry, the future still seemed to be very positive indeed with his son, Jamie and wife, Mary moving forward with several of his unfinished works. We covered the campaign to get the first project off the ground, which saw *Gemini Force 1* fully funded and ready to go into publication. *Anderson Entertainment* was in great hands, and the *STARBURST* team were looking forward to *Anderson*, the first official convention to be held by *Anderson Entertainment*. This was due to be held on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, and we were proud to be one of the main sponsors. You would naturally think that the chairman of *Fandom* would be over the moonbase alpha with the way this was all panning out. Apparently not. Timed with a nasty piece of precision, *Fandom* Chairman, Nick Williams attempted to torpedo *Anderson* by sending out a letter on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2014, which informed all members that the organisation would be severing all ties with *Anderson Entertainment*, and would not be attending *Anderson*. He clearly considered this to be pretty seismic, and definitely timed it to cause maximum damage. Surely he must have had a really good reason? After all, I heard him eulogising Gerry at his funeral and saying how kind it was to have been allowed into their home, and to have had such access and support over the years.



Isn't it fantastic that videogames now look just like movies?!

The letter itself was as long as a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie, and as vacuous as one of its scripts. It was a massive testament to his sense of self-importance, and seasoned with mammoth delusions of grandeur. You can read the whole letter online, but boiling it down into the basics Nick Williams was not happy because *Anderson Entertainment* was being run for profit unlike *Anderson*, and was also not happy that *Anderson* was being promoted as the first "official" *Gerry Anderson* convention. He felt that somewhere in the promo blurb there should have been mention of the 37 events that *Fandom* had put on over the years. Also on a more personal note, I didn't have to mention he was at the funeral because the classless chump goes on at length about him being there, and about how happy he was to help out with a glowing eulogy.

It's pretty simple to counter his arguments, you just need to apply a liberal sprinkling of common sense, and to be able to recognise an egotistical fanboy when you come across one. The protestation against *Anderson Entertainment* having a commercial agenda is meaningless. *Fandom* is non-profit as it's a fan club, run for the benefit of its members, whereas *Anderson Entertainment* is engaged in producing *Gerry*'s properties. It needs to be funded or they don't get made. Now, the assertion that *Anderson* would be the first official convention by the estate of *Gerry Anderson* is true. *Fandom* events are run by the fans (the clue is in the name), whilst this would be held by the

family of *Gerry Anderson* themselves. I know Jamie *Anderson* to be a total gent, and there was no doubt that *Fandom* would have been copiously mentioned throughout the weekend, but to mention the preceding 37 events they put on within a blurb designed to sell tickets for *Anderson*? The letter was bizarre, and represented a staggering level of unprofessionalism.

*Gerry*'s wife, Mary *Anderson* was quick to provide a prime example of ladylike restraint, and whilst refusing to get down in the mud with Williams, her reply to the letter on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2014 was quietly succinct. She was shocked and disappointed, and was certain that *Gerry* would have been too. If anyone was still uncertain as to the calibre of person Nick Williams was, you only had to wait until the day of *Anderson* itself. On 19<sup>th</sup> April 2014, *Nasty Nick* doubled down on all this bad will by choosing it as the day to announce *Fandom*'s *The Future is Perfect* convention for 2015. Just to be clear, *Fandom* are a great bunch of fans that deserve better than to be represented by a man like Nick Williams. It speaks volumes that on the *Fandom* Forum where he revealed this rival convention, members expressed their disappointment over the fact that he had chosen that day to break this news. Some felt it just looked petty and spiteful. Sadly that is clearly how Nick Williams rolls. He tried to damage *Gerry*'s son and wife, and ruin a celebration of his life. *Fandom* eh? It's a funny thing.





**Isn't it fantastic that movies now look just like videogames?!**

Irrespective, I am pleased to report that we all had a fantastic time at Anderson. Jamie Anderson and his fantastic team put together a great celebration of all of the great Gerry Anderson properties, and the panels were great. Me and Kris Heys even got to chat with the author of the latest Anderson project **Gemini Force 1** - M.G. Harris. A very easy going lady with much to say about this latest saga. All we are allowed to disclose is that it sounds very true to the spirit of all of Gerry's work, and yes it does have a secret base...

So had Nick Williams had any effect? Nah. It was sold out both days.

Now, any of you that have been reading this column for the past few years will know that I have had some serious reservations about the latest movie incarnation of Spider-Man. Back in 2012, my main problem with this reboot was that it was boring and Nolanised. Realism and a need to hide bad CGI with night shots had robbed the fun from proceedings. Well, with **The Amazing Spider-Man 2** they have learnt from the bad reception of the original, but still managed to produce something even worse. **ASM2** is a bloated, turgid trip into dubstep superhero hell. It's a movie that is so brain dead and banal it serves as a litmus test to screen for a low IQ. It may sound harsh but there is absolutely no way that anyone over the age of 7 can enjoy every this movie, without the aid of a lobotomy. I warn you up front that there are spoilers from this point on...

**ASM2** initially seemed to be keen to rectify some of the sins of the previous travesty by introducing us early on to a bit of fun crime fighting antics - this time in daylight. Sadly what appeared to be a lightweight fun motif, introducing us to a pre-Rhino Paul Giamatti, got boring and repetitious within ten minutes, and the light weight nature of these videogame cut scenes continued throughout the entire movie. The only action scene that actually works is the initial battle with Electro in Times Square. It's a well thought out scene, and had the benefit that you could actually tell what was going on, whilst being genuinely exciting. The rest of the action in this movie is just clever CGI that left me cold and uninvolved. For a comic book movie, that is a pretty fatal problem.

Again we are drawn more into the mystery of Peter Parker's parents. A totally superfluous addition to the Spider-Man mythology that does nothing but further confuse a movie that is bursting at the seams with pointless inclusions such as the Black Cat and the Chameleon. Inclusions that are so irrelevant that both fanboys and mainstream audiences just don't care. The big reveal that Spidey's powers actually come from his father is just another dumbbo inclusion meant to tie everything up with a neat little bow on top. This is a pet hate of mine - writers who are convinced that we need everything linked up, and that the random events of life are just too much for us to cope with.

In a movie where the main storyline is Spidey vs Electro. It was crucial to at least nail the portrayal of that bad guy. It was always going to be a tough sell as the comic version was never visually

that potent a threat. In the end they went for a cross between Travis Bickle and Rain Man, with a visual aesthetic that looked like Dr Manhattan overdosing on Red Bull. Well, it just didn't work for me. It felt like Spidey was fighting someone who was mentally handicapped, not some socially awkward genius, which I assume was the intention. The movie is full of misfires like this, and the end result is terribly disjointed. I have never seen a film that screamed this much of studio interference. The entire run time has a desperate feel to it as the four screen writers struggle to shoehorn in a staggering amount of info just to set up the upcoming sequels and spinoffs. A good example of this being the "Sinister Six", who will seemingly consist of anyone willing to put on one of the metal Oscorp suits in the bad guy walk-in wardrobe. I refer to my earlier statement about the stupidity required for this movie. If you thought this Goblin wardrobe (constructed just to create villains on tap for the writers), was in any way cool, then me and you have nothing further to say to each other. You are another life form. One that has yet to achieve cognitive thought.

Now we come to the big crime. The one that downgraded this movie from stupid to downright offensive. Issue 121 of **The Amazing Spider-Man** is, without any hyperbole, one of the most important comic books ever printed. **The Night Gwen Stacy Died** is seen by many as the end of the Silver Age of comics, and the end of innocence in the medium itself. After almost a decade it was the final showdown between Spider-Man and his "Moriarty", **The Green Goblin**. Gwen was killed ironically by whiplash (an injury, not a supervillain) when Spidey snagged her with webbing to save her from a fall from the George Washington Bridge, after the Goblin had pushed her. To kill off such an iconic character was virtually unheard of at the time. This led to the final battle in the following issue and finally **The Green Goblin** was no more (well for a few decades at least). It was the moment comics finally grew up, and began to be taken seriously. The opportunity to tell this story would be gold to any competent filmmaker or screenwriter. Here it gets five minutes tagged on at the end of this two hour and twenty minutes of slo-mo CGI. Almost as an epilogue, Gwen gets chucked off a pixelated clocktower by a punky glue sniffer on a hover board. Ironically, the romantic performances from Garfield and Stone were the only things worth watching, and could have made this work if told properly. When you then also throw in how they dealt with the obvious indecision over asking Simmons back to play J. Jonah Jameson, and the incomprehensible decision to include that post credits sting for the new X-Men movie. Well, for once, words actually fail me...

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